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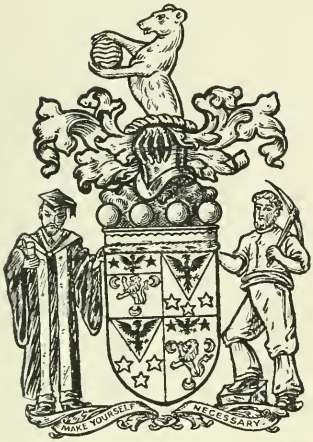

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MASTERS OF THE WORLD.

BY

MARY A. M. HOPPUS

(MRS. ALFRED MARKS).

"He was not far from any one of them."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MASTERS OF THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

VERGIL'S SEPULCHRE.

"Maroneique sedens in margine templi
Sumo animum."

VERGIL'S sepulchre stands in a garden. It was a garden eighteen hundred years ago, and the peasant who owned it made a great favour of permitting persons to come and pay their respects to the dead. There were many who came, but oftenest of all, two poets, who lived not far off—old Silius Italicus, who always devoutly kept Vergil's birthday, and young Statius, who loved to write his verses near the tomb, and get inspiration there. Had ever poet such a sepulchre before? The laughing bay he loved so well lies but just below the rock. The sunny hills rise all round, except where Capri, like a tender-tinted cloud, hangs on the purple waters. The white towns

climb up the hills. Dulcis Parthenope, now come down to the edge of the sea, is Bella Napoli to-day—foul within, but without, fair and white in the sun of Campania the Blest. Physical Nature, old Mother Earth, the Great Mother, here comes to perfection—and, by an odd coincidence, does so just above a volcano. That volcano sleeps now for the most part; the grapes grow ripe over the mouth of hell, and the summer bees gather honey on the graves of the cities of Stabia. But eighteen hundred years ago those graves were one vast field of grey ashes, from Portici to beyond Castellamare—only broken here and there by a ruined wall, rising like a fleshless skeleton from its tomb. On that side of the bay all was death and desolation, with the smoke of Vesuvius, like the smoulder of a funeral pyre, slowly rising into the unsullied sky.

But on this side all was life and fertility. There lay Parthenope—tossed, like the shining triumphal robe of Great Jove himself, high on the ample throne of the hillside, her lofty walls, which Hannibal dared not scale, glistening from afar; and, above and beyond, a sea of olives and of vineyards, with villas crowned with towers rising everywhere out of their embosoming green. Dark glossy arbutus groves broke the monotony of the olives. But what a monotony! A shimmering grey-green sweep of colour—cool and full

of repose, but yet exhaling light—the stored-up essence of the suns of ancient summers—summers which *we* call ancient, because we ourselves grow old, but which were the new summers of the world when the earth herself was young. Of all sights to satisfy the eye, and bring such quiet peace to the heart as Nature can bring, there is none like the rich and joyful monotony of an olive-grove, the great gift of Minerva. When it lies framed between sea and sky, one might sit and gaze upon it, until the pangs of ambition, the smarts of vanity, the gnawings of desire, and the sharper gnawings of regret should all die down in one's heart. Why should we grieve when the fruitful earth rejoices, and the olives lie laughing on the hill-side all the long summer afternoon?

So we say, when that part of us which is also a part of Nature hears the Mighty Mother's voice, and thrills responsive to her touch, as the aspen-leaves thrill in the wind, and we are almost persuaded to listen and be blest.

But there is in man another part, of which Nature is not the mother, and which she cannot satisfy; and so man turns from Nature to man, and so he goes from strife to strife—rending himself away from Nature, because she cannot satisfy him, yet for ever longing for her, because she is a part of him—bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, but not soul of his

soul. And so Nature and human nature are at strife, and the foot of man tramples down the flowering grass in the city-street—and all the while he is but obeying that eternal law of his being, which, whether for peace or war, for ever draws him to his kind.

* * * * * *

On the Ides of October, the year that Collega and Priscus were Consuls, Agricola had been dead two months, and the Emperor Domitian was gone on the Sarmatian Expedition. That year stands in history as the year of our Lord Christ 93, but not one of those who were gathered in front of Vergil's tomb had the least misgiving that it would ever be called anything but the 845th year of Rome.

On this 15th day of October, then, in the year of the City 845, when Silius Italicus, and Statius, and Lucius Piso were come, with their wives, and Piso's mother, Cornelia, and the young Calpurnia and Julius, his children, to hang garlands on Vergil's altar, the sky was as blue and the air as kind as on any Ides of April. Jolly October, crowned with Father Liber's grapes, has a warmer smile than ever flits across the face of inconstant April. The blue waters of the bay and the embracing amphitheatre of the hills lay bathed in the rich declining glory of the autumn afternoon, which had cast a purple veil over the ash-grey desolation of Vesuvius

opposite. Only a slender thread of smoke went up from those torn and rocky jaws, which had belched forth seas of fire fourteen years ago. And another thread of smoke, hardly more slender, was rising from the altar, and showing blue against the white marble columns of the sepulchre. It scarcely wavered in the steady air. The garlands of verbena and purple autumn flowers did not stir a leaf. The torch which Aemilia, Piso's wife, was holding had nearly gone out—there was too little wind to keep it alive. Calpurnia, her young daughter, stood next her, with the silver incense-box in her hand, and Silius had just stepped forward—the lappet of his toga reverently drawn over his head, and his tall, gaunt form not without a certain uncouth dignity, towering above every one present. He dipped his knotted fingers in Calpurnia's box, and, invoking the Manes of the dead, threw a handful of incense on the fire, which leapt to meet it in a clear blue flame. Then Calpurnia offered the box to her father, then to Statius and her brother Julius. After them, the women, also in the order of their ages, invoked the departed, and sprinkled incense on the altar. First the venerable Severa, the wife of Silius; then Cornelia, haughty and majestic; then the gracious Aemilia; and then Statius's Claudia—whose sweet eyes sought her husband's face as she called on Vergil's name.

Last of all, Calpurnia herself approached and made her offering.

When the simple rite was ended, and they had all turned to go down the steep path which led into the high road, Calpurnia looked round her and took in the scene—the little white temple, the smoking altar, the great expanse of sky and sea, Parthenope with its gleaming walls, Vesuvius and the blackened fields of lava, her mother in her robe of palest saffron, her father's stately figure, Statius with his shining eyes, and Claudia smiling on him, and old Silius and Severa. As she saw these last helping each other down the rude steps, Calpurnia thought of Baucis and Philemon. As for her father, he was like the statue of the Divine Augustus, which stood in the temple that Piso Caesoninus built to him at Puteoli. This year, on the day before the Nones of September, after the sacrifices had been offered to the Three Great Capitoline Gods for the safety of the Roman State, Cornelia had led Calpurnia into the temple, and had stood, holding her fast by the hand, before the altar of the unbloody sacrifices, beyond which stood the statue of the deified emperor, in golden armour, with his ivory sceptre in his hand. Cornelia threw incense on the sacred fire, and invoked the God, adding in a lower voice at the end of her prayer—"And grant that thy power may descend to a

successor worthy of thee!" No one but Calpurnia heard Cornelia's rash words. But was not the family of the Pisos as illustrious as any in Rome? Was not the atrium of her father's house on the Coelian Hill crowded with the images of his ancestors? Calpurnia fancied she remembered them—strange, dwarfish, smoke-blackened figures, swathed solemnly in antique Gabian garments. She used to be afraid of them as night began to fall.

It was a long time since then—it was the autumn after they returned from Britain with Agricola, eight years ago, and now Calpurnia was nearly fourteen. Perhaps she had mixed up her grandmother's descriptions with her own childish recollections. Cornelia was always talking of the Pisos, and of her own ancestors, the Scipios. But it seemed to Calpurnia that she remembered every one of those grim old effigies—from Caius, who fought at Cannae, and Lucius Piso Frugi, the annalist (of whom even her father often spoke with pride), down to her own great-grandfather Lucius, who did not fear Tiberius himself.

Calpurnia had their pedigrees and honours at her fingers' ends, and was sure she would know them all again when she went back to Rome. She sometimes imagined herself there—leading her little sister Tertia by the hand, and pointing them out to her. Little Tertia was but five years old, but she already

loved to hear Calpurnia tell of the grand sights she had seen in Rome.

They were going out at the gateway—a pretentious affair for so small a garden. The peasant-proprietor and his wife stood watching them—two homely, rustic figures, with a certain wild grace about them, which reminded Calpurnia of the Faun by the fountain on the terrace of her father's villa. It would have seemed quite natural if they had taken hands, and gone dancing away among the garden trees. Silius gave the man a present—"for the inconvenience," and both he and the woman kissed the hands of Silius and the rest, and wished them a good vintage. Calpurnia, who went out last, heard the woman say—"What did he give thee, Faustulus? Five denarii? By Castor! it is a lucky thing to have a God in one's vineyard!"

Two chaises—each fitted with a huge gaily-striped umbrella as a shield from the sun—and a four-wheeled carriage were waiting at the foot of the descent. Silius, to whom one of the chaises belonged, insisted that Piso should ride with him as far as their roads lay together.

"Our wives," he said, "will, I am certain, agree to the exchange. It is only Claudia who is always content with her Publius, and never cares to gossip with her own sex."

"How malicious of you, Silius!" called Claudia, already seated at her husband's side in the other chaise. "You wish to make Severa and Aemilia think I do not love their society, that they may give you leave to have Piso all to yourself. To punish you, I have a great mind to beg Aemilia to change places with me."

"That will not do, Claudia," said Aemilia, laughing; "we all know that neither you nor Publius would thank me for granting your request."

They all laughed. The mutual devotion of Claudia and Statius was a constant source of mild jesting on the part of Silius, who was himself a very affectionate husband. Statius and Claudia looked at each other and smiled, and Statius said—

"To tell you the truth, Silius, we could not support the passage through the Infernal Regions which we are presently to enter upon, except we were consoled by each other's company."

CHAPTER II.

THE GROTTO OF PAUSILIPPO.

The road from Parthenope to Puteoli led then, as now, through the Grotto of Pausilippo. It is, even now, unpleasant enough, but all its present inconveniences existed in a far greater degree eighteen hundred years ago. Then it was a narrow, dark, and stifling passage, unpaved, and a foot deep in dust, the haunt of beggars and loafers of the lowest class; but it was only a quarter of a mile long, and could be driven through in five minutes. The Old Road over the hill, always very bad, was now become scarcely practicable for carriages—the Municipal Aediles of Parthenope not caring to keep it up, as everybody now took the New Road.

The instant Piso and his company entered the Grotto, they were assailed by the beggars, who ran on each side of the carriage with a nimbleness and security only to be acquired by a lifetime of practice. The maimed, the halt, and the blind vied with each

other in their appeals to the compassion or the disgust of these noble travellers. The senatorial gown of Silius was the signal for every beggar in the Grotto to hurry towards it as fast as his or her infirmities permitted. Every variety of loathsomeness seemed to be assembled there. He that had the good fortune to have no legs was carried on the shoulders of a stalwart relative, and was hoisted thus almost into the chaise—to the despair and rage of a brother-professional, who, having nothing better to show than a broken knee, and being grievously impeded by his crutch sinking in the dust at every step, was in danger of being overlooked altogether. Beggars with sickening ulcers thrust their sores into Claudia's face, and plucked at Statius's toga. As for the blind, they extended claw-like hands, guided by sympathizing friends, and implored the noble gentlemen in piteous accents to give a poor little old blind man a sestertius, and he would put up prayers for a good vintage, and all the other blessings of human life.

"Give me a sestertius, noble Piso, and may you be thrice Consul, and live a hundred years!" cried a man, who, having been born without fingers, had made a comfortable living ever since. He was at this moment exhibiting himself to Aemilia, who hastily gave him a coin, and flung a few pieces of money into the road, hoping that her tormentor would stay

behind to search for them. Piso and the other gentlemen had already done the same, and thus purchased a temporary respite.

Perhaps owing to the vintage just then beginning, the Grotto was unusually thronged. Wine-carts, men carrying skins on their backs, and trains of mules, left very little space either for carriages or for ordinary foot-passengers, in a thoroughfare only just wide enough for three carriages to pass abreast, and where, with the exception of one or two caves, hollowed in the rock, there was no escape from a crush. The carriages could only go at a foot-pace, and even then, they were at every moment threatened with a block. Meantime the din was hideous, and Silius, who was trying to tell Piso about a copy of the *Aeneid*, once the property of the philosopher Seneca, which he had just purchased at Diomede the bookseller's in Parthenope, was obliged to put his mouth close to Piso's ear to make him hear. That nothing might be wanting, this Inferno of sound raged in a Cimmerian darkness, made dimly visible here and there by the lurid light of a swinging lamp, whose feeble rays glimmered ineffectually through the thick clouds of dust which filled the polluted air. The largest of these lamps hung over the entrance to the Cave of Priapus, near the middle of the Grotto. Some revellers in the cave were roaring out a tipsy chorus,

and a red and unearthly glow from within fell across the tunnel in a shaft of light, clearly illuminating everything which passed. Just as the carriage of Statius reached this place, the wheel of a wine-cart immediately in front became locked in that of a waggon drawn by oxen coming in an opposite direction, and blocked the road. The revellers in the cave, perceiving this, uttered a wild whoop, and crowded out—disguised with false noses and tow wigs—still roaring their obscene ditty, with the unmistakable intention of insulting the ladies. Piso, whose carriage was next behind that of Statius, stood up, and called to his daughter, in Greek—"Calpurnia," he said, "stop your ears!"

The great four-wheeled rheda was close behind, its three horses harnessed abreast, and Piso had not raised his voice more than was absolutely necessary, nor did the votaries of Priapus appear likely to be conversant with the Greek tongue. But the instant Piso had uttered the words, that one of them, who had seemed the most drunken, cried out—also in Greek—in the high falsetto adopted by masks in the Saturnalia, which pierced through the uproar like a sharp sword—

"Oh, Dionysus! Oh, Aphrodite Anadyomene! Oh, Cotytto! Oh, Priapus! Here comes a noble virgin, just going to be initiated at Eleusis! Fie,

Priapus, fie on thee! I blush for thee, Priapus! Hide thyself, Priapus—let her not behold thine ugly face. Stop your ears, I say, Calpurnia! stop your ears!"

Despite his feigned voice and the gross impropriety of his behaviour, Piso and the rest noted at once the accent of an educated man. This was not the broken jargon picked up by a sailor in the course of his voyages to the isles of the Aegean, but pure Attic Greek—nor was the voice any longer that of a drunken man. To make up for this, however, his companions broke out into more disgusting ribaldries than before. Fortunately for their female hearers, the guttural dialect of Campania was but half intelligible to Roman ears; but their gestures and their insolent looks rendered a full comprehension of their language unnecessary. One of them made as though he would fling his arms round Statius, who instantly aimed a blow at him, which he as instantly avoided—so quickly, indeed, that Statius nearly fell out of the chaise by the force of his own blow. Claudia shrieked, the satyr-faced worshipper of Priapus burst into a shrill peal of laughter, and casting himself on the bosom of the man who had mocked Piso, bestowed upon him his rejected embrace, kissing him repeatedly, in spite of the unceremonious efforts of the other to deliver himself from these unsavoury caresses.

At this moment, a string of mules, laden with wood, grinding their way between the carriages and the wall, created an effectual diversion, by driving the whole party back into the cave. Meanwhile, the driver of Statius's chaise had jumped down, and was trying to help the waggoner to disengage his wheel; but one of the oxen turned restive, and showed an ugly desire to use his long and formidable horns. Luckily the yoke was heavy and his horns were chained to his yoke-fellow's—an apathetic beast, who appeared to have snatched at the opportunity of a nap, and to be dozing with his eyes open, after the manner of oxen.

"By Hercules! I shall never get this accursed beast to move!" cried Statius's coachman in despair. "How can I stir him, when I am crushed to death by this wine-cart, and trodden on by this fellow selling his stinking combs, and my ribs stove in with all your elbows? Malediction on you! Take your mule off my toes! Make haste, I say, make haste there, you with the wine-cart! Bestir yourself, great pig, and look to your cursed wheel, ass that you are! What do you mean by stopping my illustrious master, the learned Papinius Statius, the particular friend of our Lord God the Emperor Domitian—whom Jove preserve? And Silius, who has been thrice Consul—and the noble Piso, who has killed ten thousand Britons

at once with his own hand, besides Picts and Caledonians! I shall burst before I make this cursed beast budge! And he can't stir, if he would, with that great ass in the wine-cart gaping there like a stuck pig at a feast, instead of backing his mules! And, O ye Gods of Tartarus! here come the Priests of Cybele. Now we are lost!"

While Dromio was thus lamenting, and tugging at the refractory ox, and the waggoner was with equal vehemence objurgating him of the wine-cart—who seemed to be paralyzed by the emergency—a new chorus of unearthly yells was heard in the distance, evidently approaching rapidly, while the throng of vehicles and foot-passengers, driven back by whatever was approaching, so much increased the pressure, that the wine-cart rocked to and fro, and the rheda began to plunge.

Hitherto, Piso had sat still beside Silius, whose own driver had now dismounted and was trying to back the mules, with as little success as Dromio had had with the oxen. Piso had forbidden the coachman of the rheda to get down, and had kept his own seat, because he was unwilling to leave the women in this disorderly place without his protection, even for a moment. But he now saw that this must be risked, and with a word to Silius—who was in a high state of indignation at the unseemly behaviour of the Greek

and his companions—he leapt down and forced his way through the crowd to the heads of the great Sabine mules that drew the wine-cart. In a moment he had backed the cart and unlocked the wheels; then taking the whip from the driver, he laid it sharply about the mules, and at the same instant seizing the nearest rein, by main strength compelled them to back several yards. He next took the more tractable of the oxen by the horn, and pushing him against his fellow, the other stepped aside, and so the waggon was got out of the line. After this it was comparatively easy to make a way safely past the carriages.

Probably not more than ten minutes had been lost by this delay, but these ten minutes had been unpleasant enough to the ladies to seem an hour. The miserable heat and noise, the suffocating dust, the many evil odours of the place, were bad enough, but not so bad as the low, coarse, and cunning faces which the red glare from the den of Priapus seemed actually to evoke from the surrounding darkness. Some of these ill-favoured denizens of the Grotto passed along, like figures in a phantasmagoria, out of darkness into darkness again, and were gone; others remained, hovering like the less noble birds of prey on the outskirts of a feast—those who had anything to sell being especially importunate. Trays of glass beads and buttons made of lava, strings of cheap

coral, shell boxes, olive-wood bodkin-cases, pins for the hair, tortoiseshell combs, clasps of some sort of alloy, coloured to look like brass—all these, and a hundred other bits of trumpery, cunningly contrived to conjure sesterces out of peasants' purses, were thrust half a dozen at a time into the carriage where the ladies sat, their respective owners all the while bawling out the prices and singular merits of their wares.

"Here, my pretty young lady, look at my coral!" cried one.

"Don't look at hers—mine's better!" vociferated another, dexterously pushing her aside. "Just see what a colour—it would just suit a young lady with lovely golden hair like yours! The very best coral, only a denarius the string"—this being exactly three times the price the vendor asked her plebeian customers. "Only a denarius the string—four strings for three denarii. They'll ask you three denarii for a single string in Parthenope, in the Quarter of the Sun—and four at Lysander's, in Puteoli—may I perish if I lie!"

The speaker was an old harridan, as dry as a mummy. She thrust her tray of coral so hastily under Calpurnia's nose, that she upset a larger tray of glass beads which an old man was urging upon Calpurnia's attention at the same moment. The old

man raved and stormed, shook his fist in the woman's face, and swore his beads were all broken and himself ruined. He invoked alternately the Gods, and the Duumvirs of Parthenope, and seemed ready to tear the old woman to pieces. She defended herself with still greater fury, vowed he had upset his tray himself, to prevent the illustrious ladies from buying her coral, and called all the Gods to witness that he was a thief. Every one knew that his father was crucified for robbing a temple, and his mother——

She was doubtless prepared to reveal the iniquities of all the family, but the man, with a yell of rage, fell upon her, and her further disclosures were inarticulate. A wild scuffle ensued, from which the old man shortly afterwards emerged, his cheeks bearing the marks of the lady's nails, and, piteously bewailing his wrongs, he overwhelmed Julius with blessings for having picked up the tray and the beads from the bottom of the carriage. Aemilia bought two necklaces to console him, at which he declared he was saved—but at that instant, his adversary, breaking away from the women who were holding her back, seized him by his tunic, which she nearly tore off, shrieking that her coral was gone, ruined, trampled under the mules' feet—but he should pay for it—she would have him whipped in the Forum of Parthenope! "Thief! Assassin! Carrion-crow!"

Just then a train of mules laden with empty wine-skins pushed in between the belligerents and the carriage, and gave Calpurnia leisure to listen to a woman's voice which had been whispering in her ear ever since the carriages had stopped. It happened that the fan of light from the Cave of Priapus left in darkness all behind Calpurnia, who had been squeezed into the wide back-seat, in order to remove her as much as possible from observation. Severa, who was rather deaf, sat in the inside, and beyond her, on the same seat, Cornelia; while Æmilia and Julius were in front, in fullest glare of the light. For some minutes, Calpurnia had been aware of a very soft and sweetly-modulated voice—evidently a woman's and a foreigner's —speaking to her from the darkness behind.

"Let me tell your fortune, my pretty lady! It ought to be a good one, by your face. Surely you were born under a lucky star! Perhaps I can tell you all you would know—I come from Thessaly, and understand all the mysteries. Let me read your fortune—not now—I must see your hand—but another time. You will know me when you meet me again. I can tell you more than you think; I can tell you your thoughts, as well as your fortune. I know what was in your heart as you came down from the Magician's Tomb. 'Tis some one else's fortune, and not your own, you want to know. There is some

one dearer to you than the young gentleman you are betrothed to—a good young gentleman he is, and will escape great dangers, and make you a good husband. But before that, there's great trouble and many tears, and you'll have your heart's desire, and it will bring you grief and pain, and many's the time you'll wish yourself back again at Baiae. Ah! you may well start to find your secret heart can be read; but fear nothing—no none else can read it, only me—and there is a good spirit attends you. A thousand blessings on you"—here a small soft hand closed gently on the denarius which Calpurnia had taken out of the purse hanging round her neck. "Farewell! We shall meet again in both light and darkness."

Calpurnia tried to catch a glimpse of the speaker, but all she saw was a figure with covered head gliding past the back of the carriage. She fancied it exchanged a few words with her grandmother, but the noise and confusion were so great and the crowd pressed on them so closely that she could not be sure of this.

Calpurnia had driven through the Grotto at least a hundred times before, and it had always been dusty, stifling, and noisy, and the hawkers and beggars had always been importunate; but she had never seen it so crowded as this time, and with so ill-conducted a crowd.

At this moment, she saw her father—his stalwart form seeming that of a Hercules among the less muscular Campanians—leading the huge oxen. To her exceeding surprise, she also saw the Greek from the Cave of Priapus dancing along behind Piso, waving his arms, uttering hoots and yells, and seeming to be as drunk as ever. As soon as he had got the waggon past the rheda, Piso turned, and his tormentor, who seemed to be as slippery as an eel, lost himself in the crowd. But his drunkenness must have been assumed, for, while seeming only to utter obscenities, he had whispered a few hurried sentences into Piso's ear, which were not the words of a drunken man.

"With such godlike strength, Piso, why not be a God?" he had whispered in Greek, and then had howled out an unseemly jest, like the drunken buffoon he appeared. "The deity who rules us has not so imperial a presence as you, Piso—and he is a coward, while you are a soldier—Agricola's favourite Tribune, who charged the Caledonians home under the Grampian Mountain." Here he interrupted himself to play his other part, and then went on, "The cup of empire has twice—nay, thrice—been held to the lips of a Piso. Caius Piso hung back like you, to perish as you will perish. Piso, you must reign or die!" And then, in still more hurried and urgent

accents, he hissed in Piso's ear, "Go back to Rome while the tyrant is absent! When Jove is distant, distant is his thunder. Go back, and let *him* never return!"

The Greek disappeared into the obscurity as he spoke, but before Piso could mount to his seat beside Silius, a new tumult filled the Grotto with a still more hideous uproar, and the way was again rendered impassable. A troop of the wild Galli—whose yells had long been heard in the distance—on one of their begging expeditions, had halted in front of the Cave of Priapus, and were beginning their mad dance round their Goddess—a black and shapeless image under a canopy, borne on four poles by four of the priests. The place was eminently ill-calculated for their performance, but the quick eye of the leader—a tall old man, whose thin grey hair hung down in curls under his mitre—had instantly perceived that the occupants of the carriage wore the toga and were persons of rank. These Priests of Cybele were a sort of fanatical mountebanks, who might have been charitably set down as madmen, if they had not made so good a thing out of their madness. They now leaped and danced, brandishing their knives—which gleamed like lightning where they caught the glow from the cave—and uttering frightful yells, which almost drowned the music of

the soft Phrygian flutes, and even the tinkling of the cymbals and the rattle of the castanets with which their dance was accompanied. Those who carried the Goddess moved in a more measured time, till she swayed in the imperfect light like a ship tossing at sea. The light fell on the wild figures, the faces daubed with white and red paint, the purple and yellow tunics, and the long, dishevelled locks, which stood out from their heads as their dance grew wilder. They bounded high in the air—from mingled superstition and bodily fear the passengers had with one accord given them ample room—they yelled more madly, they rolled their necks until they seemed on the point of dislocating them. At last, lashed by their artificial madness into a genuine frenzy, they bit themselves till the blood flowed down their arms, and even gashed themselves with their knives. And then, as though by a preconcerted signal, they suddenly ceased, let their bleeding arms fall to their sides, and awaited the donations of the pious spectators. One fellow produced a bag from the bosom of his garment, and held it to receive whatever was offered. The people, as they always did, hastened to respond. Those who had money gave it, those who had none dropped apples, chestnuts, lumps of cheese, anything they had, into the hungry mouth of the bag. Statius flung in two denarii, Silius and Piso threw each a

golden denarius, their coachmen seized the opportunity to drive on, and, as the Grotto was now tolerably clear at the other end, they soon emerged into the light of the day.

CHAPTER III.

VERGILIAN LOTS.

As soon as the intolerable atmosphere and the deafening noise of the Grotto were left behind, every one drew a deep breath—it was as though they wished to purify themselves in the sweet sunny air, which, even during the short time they had been in the Grotto, had grown perceptibly cooler, with the first sharpness of an autumn evening.

"I am nearly suffocated," said Aemilia, shaking the dust from her dress. "I thought we should never get out! And, of all things, I detest meeting the Priests of Cybele!"

Piso was just then expressing the same sentiment to Silius.

"I could wish," he said, "that the worship of the Phrygian Goddess had never been brought us from Asia. I do not love these primitive Eastern divinities. It may be true that they are symbols of the first principles of Life, and as such an occasional recogni-

tion of them may have a meaning. Yet I think their rites are needlessly degrading. That they are attended by grave dangers to the state has been proved over and over again. For my part, I approve the wisdom of our fathers, who forbade all foreign rites, and I regret that we ever learned to honour any but the Great Gods of Rome."

"I am astonished to hear you speak thus, Piso," said Silius. "You—an Epicurean, a sceptic, a disciple of Lucretius! I thought you disbelieved in the Gods altogether."

"I neither believe, nor wholly disbelieve," replied Piso. "And as for Lucretius, greatly as I admire his theory of the Origin of Things, I have a growing dislike for his theory of morals and his rules of conduct. Nor can I entirely accept his condemnation of religion. For such an exhibition as we have just seen, there is nothing but disgust and contempt. These emasculated Priests of Cybele belong essentially to a lower civilization, and ought to have remained in the East. But the old Gods of Rome—Jove, Juno, Minerva, Mars—represented sublime ideas, and were worshipped by all the men who made Rome great—the men who made a sheepfold on a hillock in the Latin plain the Mistress of the World. Cincinnatus, Camillus, the Decii, the Scipios—these men were not ashamed to sacrifice to their country's Gods and

beseech them to keep the walls of Rome. The Great Africanus never appears to me so great as when, in his Censorship, he changed the ancient prayer, that 'Rome might be increased and magnified,' and only asked that she might be continued in her present greatness and prosperity. We are more splendid than our fathers, Silius, and deeper read in science and philosophy; but are we as great, as brave, as faithful as they?"

"All men think their own days degenerate," said Silius. "For my part, I accept the Gods, and ask no questions concerning them. But now that we are so near my house, you must come in and see my new *Aeneid*."

The road rapidly descended to the shores of the bay, with the sea always in view, and the headland of Misenum, with Prochyta lying just off the point, and farther off Capreae, glowing like a great amethyst in the setting sun. Calpurnia could see the marble wall of her father's house projecting out into the sea, and the trees in the gardens, and the white houses of Baiae, gleaming in the declining rays of the sun—which, even while she gazed, slid behind the headland, and plunged the western side of the bay in a universal misty purple greyness.

Cicero's Villa—"The Academy," as he had fondly called it, laying out its gardens in imitation of the

Groves of Academus—was beyond the town of Puteoli. All the road from the Grotto had lain through a thickly peopled district—one village had scarcely ended when another began, and everywhere the villas and gardens of the gentry made landmarks on the fertile plain.

Now, as Silius and his friends approached Puteoli, the signs of the neighbourhood of a great town became every instant more manifest, and as soon as they passed the barren lava hill, called in derision the Olive Mount, they were in Puteoli. Every moment carriages overtook or met them, and the streets were full of people. The wheels of the carriages rattled over the great rough blocks of tufa with which the streets were paved, and the street urchins ran along by the carriages, at the peril of their lives, sometimes turning a wheel, sometimes climbing up behind the rheda. Presently, a side-street gave a view of the harbour, with a forest of masts standing up against a turquoise sky, and in a moment more the carriages dashed into the Forum of Puteoli. The citizens were standing about in groups—the women by the fountains, the men under the porticoes, and the air was full of the hum of voices. It was growing dusk, but the lofty Corinthian columns of the Temple of Augustus seemed to shed an unearthly light over all that side of the Forum. In

the enclosed area in front stood the altar of sacrifice; but the temple-doors were closed, the fire on the altar had long since burned down, and there was no one near but a man wrapped in a cloak of the Grecian fashion, who was sitting on the marble wall of the temple area.

"Hail, Piso! Hail, Silius and Statius, and all you honest people!" cried this person, without rising.

"I greet you, Demetrius," said Piso, as the chaise slackened its pace. "Would you speak with me?"

"Not I, Piso; I never waste words," replied the other.

"In any case, I wish you a good appetite and pleasant dreams to-night, Demetrius," returned Piso, with perfect good-humour. "We must let a Cynic bark," he added to Silius.

"Yes," replied Silius, "if he does not take to biting as well. I, for my part, am disposed to think most Cynics are nothing else but philosophical impostors."

"Demetrius is no impostor," said Piso. "There must be some good in the man who could dare to stand by Thrasea——"

But before that name could fairly pass Piso's lips, Silius had checked his friend, and drowned the dangerous word by a well-feigned cough, at the same time indicating with his thumb the slave who was driving them.

"I can't agree with you," he said. "His only object is, and always has been, to make himself of importance. He wishes to be singular. Of all vanities, Piso, there is none worthy to be compared with the vanity of a Cynic."

Here the conversation was interrupted by Statius and Claudia taking their leave, as their villa lay a little way out in the country, in the direction of the Temple of Serapis and the Baths. Piso did not speak again until they were out of the town, driving along a road with high walls on each side, over which showed the tops of plane-trees.

Presently, on that side of the road nearest the sea, they came to a stone gateway, with stone vases above it, and closed by a large double door painted green. The drivers cracked their whips and shouted, and the doors were opened inwards by the slaves who had been waiting there on purpose.

"A beautiful place," said Piso, as the carriage dashed along under the trees of the paradise. The nearer he approached home, the more furiously did Silius's driver urge on his horses, as though his reputation depended on his arriving at a gallop.

"It is pretty," said Silius, rather indifferently. "The immortal Tullius laid it out, and so it must always be dear to me. But I have for some time been in negotiation for the villa in which our divine

Maro used to live. You know it—it lies close down on the shore, among the gardens, below Parthenope. It is not large; but it is a gem—everything perfect. Such statues! Such pictures!"

"By Hercules! Silius, you are as fickle towards your villas as a lover is to his mistresses," said Piso. "No sooner are you comfortably established in a house which you have assured us all is the very thing you have been seeking, than you remark that it is well enough, but you have just seen something you like still better. I confess I thought that Cicero would hold you fast."

"My dear Piso," said Silius, quite unconscious that his friend was rallying him, "*Vergil* had the other. I would not leave Cicero for any one but Vergil, I promise you. And I do assure you it *is* the very thing, and much superior even to this."

They were at the house as he spoke. Silius courteously assisted the ladies to dismount from the rheda, and invited his guests to enter the spacious atrium, where a fountain made a pleasant murmur, and marble nymphs hid themselves, to be perceived the more, in the green thicket around the impluvium. Within doors it was already dusk, and the lamps were lighted. Silius took up one, and led the way through several richly decorated reception-rooms into his library, whence by daylight there was a fine view.

"Pray be seated, dear friends," said he. "Here is my new treasure, Piso; what do you think of it? It was sold me as *partly* in Vergil's own hand," Silius went on, tenderly taking the rolls out of their box. "But *I* believe they are *all* in his hand, and that he began to copy, intending to make a present to Maecenas — or perhaps to Octavia — or even to Augustus himself. For, pray notice what superb paper he has used—Augustan, as you see by the width of the sheets. Then, too, each volume is in a parchment case, dyed the very best purple. The cases alone must have cost him a mina. Then the paper itself is stained saffron at the back, in the very best manner, and all the titles are beautifully done in vermilion. The sticks are ivory, and the knobs tortoiseshell and silver. Did you ever see anything more elegant?"

"It is indeed a sumptuous copy," said Piso. "I congratulate you, Silius."

"After he had seen it," said Severa, "he could talk of nothing else. He was so terribly afraid some one else would see it, and outbid him—though Diomede had promised him the refusal—that the day before yesterday he was up at sunrise, and had reached Parthenope before Diomede, who is a lazy old fellow, had opened his shop."

"I should think so, indeed!" cried Silius. "I

cannot imagine how I can have been such a fool as not to have closed instantly with Diomede! I could scarcely sleep at night for fear I had missed it, and now I can scarcely sleep for joy that I possess it. I have written to my son Severus to tell him what an heirloom I shall leave behind me. Now I have only to complete the purchase of Vergil's Villa to perfect my happiness. Imagine my sensations on crossing that sacred threshold as its owner, with these precious volumes in my hand, which we may safely say Vergil actually wrote—in part at least—under that very roof!"

"Silius," said Cornelia, suddenly—she had been examining the volumes more carefully than any one else—"as this is a sort of sacred copy, let us try the Vergilian lots."

Aemilia turned pale, and looked at Piso, whose face had clouded. But Silius, who was as eager as a child with a new toy, cried—

"With all my heart! though you, Lucius, I think, smile at these things, and even make small account of unlucky days, and would join battle on the day after the Ides——"

"Nay," said Piso; "Fortune is never so certain that a wise man will neglect any means of propitiating her—the unlikely as well as the likely. I hold Terentius Varro a fool. He should have re-

membered that if the omen meant nothing to *him*, it might mean everything to those under his command. The frame of mind, too, which can set omens at defiance appears to me to be very likely to lead to a great downfall."

"Then you will not laugh at us," said Silius. "I will shuffle the volumes. Julius, carry out the lamps."

Julius did so. A glimmer of light from the brazier was all that remained.

"In what order shall we consult the lots?" asked Silius.

"In the order of our ages," replied Cornelia. "First, you yourself; then our good Severa——"

"No," said Severa; "the lot of Caius is mine; let him consult the oracle for us both."

"Very well," said Silius. "Calpurnia, shuffle the volumes for us. And now may the Gods grant us fortunate answers!" He selected a volume as he spoke, unrolled it, and placed the thumb of his right hand at random on the papyrus.

"Bring us a light, Julius," he said.

Julius obeyed, and Silius read—

> "'Live happy, you, whose fortune is complete;
> From one fate to another *we* are called.
> Quiet is yours—you need not plough the main,
> Nor seek Ausonian fields that still recede—'

"It is the farewell of Aeneas to Andromache and

Helenus," said Silius. "Be it so. It is a happy response. I accept the omen."

"And I," said Severa, looking affectionately at her husband. "And now it is the turn of Cornelia."

"No; Lucius shall try next—I wish it," said Cornelia. "Julius, carry away the lamp."

Piso, who had made some ineffectual protests, came forward, and unrolled the first volume his hand touched.

"Come back, Julius! We are ready," called Silius.

As Piso's eye fell on the part of the page upon which he had placed his finger, Calpurnia, watching him with an anxiety she did not herself comprehend, saw him start. But his countenance remained unmoved, and it was with an unconcerned voice that he read the words of Hecuba to Priam, when he totters forth to meet the enemy, after Troy is taken—

> "'Not help like this, defenders such as these,
> This hour demands—here, Hector's arm were vain.'"

"Carry away the lamp again, Julius," said Cornelia —a strange thrill shaking her voice, usually so steady. "I will see if the Oracle will vouchsafe *me* a more propitious answer."

There was an intense silence as Cornelia shuffled the volumes. Piso, standing apart and watching her in the glimmer of the firelight, saw her hand twice change its direction. Aemilia, who knew why Cornelia

had wished to consult the lots, thought her heart would stand still. She knew not what to wish for—a favourable or an unfavourable reply would be alike terrible. Oh, if only Cornelia might alight on some peaceful, harmless verses, like those which Silius had drawn for his lot!

"Julius, bring the light," said Cornelia.

Aemilia rose and went to the table—so did Calpurnia—but Piso did not move from where he stood at the farther end of the room.

"Can you not see, Cornelia?" asked Silius. "Shall we have another lamp?"

"I can see; my eyes are as good as ever," said Cornelia, rather sharply. "I must have entered the house with my left foot foremost," she continued, evidently doing her best to speak lightly. "I have drawn a most melancholy lot. See; read it for me, Silius."

Cornelia could not trust herself to read the lines. After all her doubt and hesitation, she had managed to pitch upon Vergil's lament for the young Marcellus, at which it was said that Octavia fainted, when Vergil read it before her.

> "'What groans arise from that fam'd Field of Mars
> By the great city? And what fun'ral rites,
> Tiber, shalt thou behold, as thou shalt flow
> Past the new sepulchre?'

"I congratulate you, Cornelia," said Silius, when

he had read these lines. "If we may attach any weight to such lesser divinations, the reply seems to hint at very unusual honours to be paid to yourself or some one of your family—for every one knows that there was such a lament made for the young Marcellus as was never made for any other mortal man, except for the first Germanicus."

"The first Germanicus—who, then, is the second?" asked Piso, abruptly.

"Why, of course, the Emperor—our present Caesar," said Aemilia, hastily; "but, to be sure, one just as often thinks of him as Dacicus."

"Ah! talking of Dacicus," said Silius, "I have been polishing up the *Punica*, Piso, and I have, I flatter myself, made one or two telling improvements in my description of the battle of Cannae, especially where I relate the death of Aemilius Paullus. I should like to read it to Aemilia, if you have time to listen."

"I shall expect to hear it next time we meet, Silius," said Aemilia; "but now we really must not stay another instant. My uncle Arulenus Rusticus and my young cousin Quintus are coming to us from Rome, and were to reach Baiae before night. They will, I fear, arrive before us."

"Will you not at least try your own fate with the lots?" asked Severa, smiling.

"No," replied Aemilia hastily, "I never wish to

know what is going to happen. To know it could not make me happier."

"That's just what I say, Aemilia!" cried Severa. "So long as my husband and my sons are well, I ask to know no more. That reminds me—have you heard from your Caius lately?"

"A fortnight ago, by a ship that called at Puteoli on her way to Ostia," replied Aemilia. "He was well, and is to come home in the spring. Oh, what a blessed day that will be!"

So Aemilia said, not knowing what should happen the day her son Caius should come home.

CHAPTER IV.

LUCIUS CALPURNIUS PISO.

It was quite dark some time before the rheda drew up at the foot of the marble steps in front of the splendid portico—in itself containing as many rooms as a small villa—through which was the chief entrance to the Villa of the Pisos at Baiae. Slaves with torches had been running on each side of the carriage all the way from the gate of the grounds, and the portico was lighted by a long line of swinging oil-lamps, which threw an effective, if somewhat uncertain, illumination over the polished columns, the tesselated pavement, and the frescoes of the inner wall. The great door of the atrium stood wide, its bronze panels folded inwards, and in the middle of the portico stood two figures in travelling dress—wide hats and ample cloaks—who came hurrying down the steps to greet Piso and Aemilia.

"Welcome, welcome, dearest uncle!" cried Aemilia, throwing herself into the arms of the elder and

shorter of these two persons. "Pray forgive us for not being here to receive you—Silius detained us——"

"It is not the first time, Arulenus, that you come here," said Piso, kissing him. "But is this Quintus? Why, Arulenus, he has outtopped you!"

"It was not difficult to do that," replied Arulenus, whom Cornelia had rather coldly suffered to embrace her. "We are not all of heroic stature, like yourself, Piso."

"I of heroic stature?" said Piso, laughing. "Why, I have been looking up to Silius for the last three hours, until my neck aches."

"Silius is like a ship's mast, or an ensign, or a tree lopped of its branches," said Arulenus.

During this friendly banter they had all entered the atrium.

"We are very late," said Piso. "Arulenus, you and Quintus will take a hasty bath, and supper shall be served in half an hour."

At supper, Arulenus and Quintus had the chief part of the conversation to themselves. Perhaps the presence of the servants kept Piso silent. Cornelia was preoccupied, and, however carefully she strove to hide it, ill at ease. But Calpurnia thought no one observed this but herself. Aemilia seemed engrossed in the conversation of the new-comers, and, whenever

it flagged, whipped it up again with some question about Rome.

Were most people come back from Albanum now Caesar was gone away? Was not this Edict forbidding the shopkeepers to set out their wares in the streets a great improvement? Had Plutarch begun his lectures again? And did he still lecture in Greek? How was Quintilian? And how did Arulenus like Quintilian's new wife? Who had made the best speech at the Baetican trial—Senecio or Pliny? Was Martial in town? And had he made any new epigrams? Was Aunt Junia better? And, above all, did Aunt Gratilla really mean to come and spend the spring with them, as she had been promising to do for a whole year past? With these and other equally safe questions, Aemilia prevented a too ominous silence from attracting the attention of the slaves. Not that she mistrusted the slaves; on the contrary, she believed them to be much attached to their master. But the air was full of danger, and one never knew from which quarter of heaven a storm might come. Arulenus no doubt guessed her drift, for he answered her at length, and apparently with perfect freedom.

The supper was laid in one of the smaller dining-rooms, and, although the villa was considered one of the most magnificent in Italy, a certain stately

simplicity struck Arulenus, fresh as he was from the lavish ostentation of Rome. Everything was befitting the dignity of a great Roman noble—equally removed from the sybarite's parade of luxury and the cynic's parade of simplicity. And in Piso himself the same unaffected dignity was apparent.

Piso was a man of a most majestic presence, and, even clad in the simple gown for which he exchanged his toga when indoors, he appeared a very distinguished person. He was above the middle height, though not of gigantic stature; but Arulenus had truly said that he was of heroic mould. If he had been less tall, his figure would have seemed heavy—so broad was his chest and so powerful were his shoulders. His head, thickly covered with closely curling dark hair, was rather small in proportion to his frame, but every line and curve of it told of concentrated intellect and will. His forehead was wide, and rose up almost straight from the strongly marked eyebrows, which yet had a delicate curve. His nose was aquiline, with small, well-cut nostrils; his eyes were a clear hazel, with a good space between them; and his mouth and chin were well-formed, the chin having that firm roundness supposed to mark a character at once resolute and mild. Piso bore a strong resemblance to his mother; but Cornelia's face was longer in proportion—her nose was a more

pronounced eagle's beak—indeed, there was much that was eagle-like in her stern countenance, with its piercing eyes and air of haughty disdain—lofty and stern enough to be that of a Roman matron of antiquity. She was but little over sixty, and her tall, upright form seemed still as vigorous as ever. Her hair, now streaked with grey, was partly concealed under a veil of some soft, semi-transparent texture, fastened with two magnificent topaz pins. Her only other ornament was a great gold clasp set with topazes, which fastened the folds of her dress above the left shoulder.

If Piso's outward form was a type of manly vigour, Aemilia was well-matched with him. She, too, was tall, and her limbs had a statuesque grandeur, like those of the statue of Erato, in the Vatican—which she also resembled in countenance. She had the same largeness of repose in the curves of her brow and mouth, the same full-lidded eyes and straight nose—even the same expression of dreamy intentness which Erato wears as her fingers strike the strings. Aemilia's voice was singularly sweet and rich, so that her simplest words seemed to be set off by it. Although her eldest son was eighteen years old, she was not yet thirty-five, and was still in the full perfection of matronly beauty. Aemilia's mother was the elder sister of Arulenus Rusticus, and came of a patrician

house of Verona. She married an Aemilius, and went to live at Rome. But her husband died a few months after his marriage, and Aemilia's mother went back to her own family at Verona; there Aemilia was born, and there she lived till her mother died. Then her uncle Arulenus fetched her to Rome, where she married young Lucius Piso, whose father had been an intimate friend of Paetus Thrasea.

Vespasian was Emperor when Aemilia came to Rome; but the dreadful memories of Nero's reign still haunted all men's minds. In many of these terrible stories Arulenus had been an actor. He had early cast in his lot with the Stoics, and was a devoted disciple of Thrasea—who, being of Padua, seemed to him his countryman. He was a Tribune of the Commons—a young man, in his first public office—when Thrasea was condemned, and he had offered to interpose his veto. It was a mad proposal, and Thrasea knew it, and dissuaded the fiery young Tribune from flinging his life away in vain.

Arulenus's North-Italian descent showed itself in his fair complexion and blue eyes, in which a little of the old Gallic fury could sometimes kindle. His great, loose locks of tow-coloured hair were much too long for the present fashion. A long scar on his cheek was the mark of a wound received the day the Vespasians entered Rome—when Arulenus, as

Praetor, went out to intercede with Cerealis for the City.

Young Lucius Piso, just come to man's estate, saw this tremendous day, when the victors perished with the vanquished. He saw the flames of the Capitol, and heard the clang of arms, and the cries of the combatants in furious conflict on the Hundred Steps, when the gate was barricaded with the statues of ancient Kings and Consuls—while the base populace looked on and clapped its hands to see the empire of the world lost and won.

Piso's father was the grandson of that Lucius Piso whom Tiberius himself dared not defy, and who thrust himself into the breach to defend his kinsman Cneius. He was a cousin of that Caius whose name was given to the conspiracy which dragged down with it Seneca and all the noblest heads in Rome. He himself escaped by being absent in Judaea, to which province he had been appointed Quaestor, the year after the Great Fire. He was an ardent lover of old Roman virtue, and he thought that in Thrasea he saw it live again; so, when he departed for his province, he commended his young son to Thrasea, and, in his last farewell, bade Lucius resemble him. Three years afterwards, Piso fell under the walls of Jerusalem, in one of the sallies made by the besieged.

Meanwhile, the conspiracy of his cousin Caius had

been disclosed by Scaevinus's freedman, and no one bearing the name of Piso was safe in Rome. Cornelia retired with her son to Tuscany, and remained there till the death of Nero. But she then returned, and took up her abode in her husband's house on the Coelian.

When the old Sabine farmer's son was firmly established on the throne of the Caesars, it seemed as though the evil days were past, and young Lucius Piso began his career under the happiest auspices. The son of Vespasian's favourite Quaestor, who had fallen fighting under the eyes of Titus himself, and with the most illustrious blood in Rome flowing in his veins, there was nothing to which he might not aspire—not even empire. Had not his kinsman, Piso Licinianus, been adopted and proclaimed Caesar by Galba? When Lucius Piso married Aemilia, and went with Agricola to Aquitaine, no young Roman had brighter prospects. How bitter, then, was his awakening, when, after fighting through all Agricola's seven campaigns in Britain, and especially distinguishing himself in the last decisive victory of the Grampians, he was recalled with Agricola to share his great commander's disgrace!

If Agricola had desired the empire, there was a moment when he could have stretched out his hand and seized it. But that was when he was in Britain,

at the head of his victorious legions. He understood his recall; but he obeyed, and once in Rome he was powerless.

Agricola was grown too great. His real victories made the Dacian Triumph ridiculous. Domitian could not himself gain any battles, but he could prevent Agricola from gaining any more. So, though Decebalus was cutting off Roman legions in Dacia, and Saturninus was rebelling on the Rhine, Agricola sat idle at Rome, and his most distinguished lieutenant ate his heart out in splendid banishment at Baiae, seeking what consolation he could find in the cultivation of his vines, and in the composition of a *History of the Roman Senate*.

CHAPTER V.

NEWS FROM ROME.

Meanwhile Quintus was giving Calpurnia an account of the Baetican trial, at which Herennius Senecio and Pliny had conducted the prosecution for the Spaniards against their ex-Governor, Baebius Massa. Quintus was just beginning to practise in the Courts himself, and was thus able to give a professional opinion.

"You should have heard Pliny wither him up!" cried Quintus. "'Pray, Baebius,' says he, 'did you ever hear tell of one Verres, who oppressed the people of Sicily a long while ago? One would think you had made him your model!' You should have seen Baebius's face—it was purple! I really thought he would spring at Pliny. My friend, Suetonius Tranquillus," continued Quintus, "thinks Pliny's is a better style than Quintilian's—not so florid, you know. By-the-by, when are Caius and Aulus coming home from Athens?"

"They are to come in the spring," replied Calpurnia. "They are first to visit the cities of Asia. Then from Ephesus they will sail for Alexandria; and so, if the Gods will, we shall have them with us in May."

Quintus was aware of a fall in his spirits while Calpurnia was speaking. Aulus Atticus was Piso's ward, the only child of that young praefect whose horse carried him into the midst of the enemy at the Battle of the Grampians, where Piso commanded the Twentieth Legion. Quintus knew that Aulus was looked on as Calpurnia's future husband, and until now the knowledge had not caused him any emotion. But to-night, Calpurnia looked so sweet, and was grown so womanly—Quintus had not seen her for nearly six months—that he found himself hoping the visit to the cities of Asia might detain Aulus and Caius longer than they at present reckoned on.

Piso, who had contented himself with listening to the answers Arulenus gave to Aemilia's questions, now seemed to rouse himself, and asked—

"Have you seen Flavius Clemens lately?"

"He has been at Albanum all the summer," said Arulenus. "I saw him about two months since. He and Domitilla were well, and the boys were grown."

"And *is* it true that Veiento's wife has run off to Alexandria with Sergius the gladiator?" asked

Aemilia, who did not wish the Flavii to be discussed just then.

"It is true," replied Arulenus; "and every one at Rome has been making merry over her taste—for Sergius is perfectly hideous—blear-eyed, and with a great wen under his nose."

"Disgusting!" said Aemilia.

"And yet," continued Arulenus, "a great many of those who laugh are afraid the next piece of scandal will be that their own wives have followed Hippia's example, for the craze of women of rank for gladiators has reached a pitch which is really incredible. Every week some *lanista* opens a new school where ladies can learn the exercises."

It was not till the young people had gone to bed that Piso ventured to ask Arulenus what was said in Rome about the death of Agricola.

"It is said," replied Arulenus, "that Domitian was very assiduous in sending his own physician to see him."

"What does Decidiana say?" asked Aemilia, in a whisper.

"She doubts," said Arulenus, in the same undertone.

"Where is she?" asked Piso.

"Gone to join Cornelius Tacitus and her daughter," replied Arulenus. "You know that Agricola appointed the Emperor co-heir with his wife and daughter?"

"Yes," replied Piso, "yes; I heard so."

"It was the best thing he could do, you know," observed Arulenus. "I do not think you should blame him."

"The Gods forbid that I should blame him!" said Piso. And then, as though the subject were too painful to be pursued farther, he asked abruptly, "Is there any news from Sarmatia?"

"Only the usual bulletins stuck up in the Forum," replied Arulenus. "'*On the 16th of the Calends of the month Germanicus, formerly called September, the Immortal Gods granted a new victory to Caesar's eagles. Ten thousand Sarmatians were destroyed.*' That was one of them. I forget the rest; but they are much alike."

"Immortal Gods!" cried Piso, starting from his seat. "I shall never school myself to patience! How can a soldier who has fronted the enemy in a score of battles endure to hear this farce? It was bad enough when Nero played the charioteer, the musician, and the poet—but Domitian plays the general——"

"Hush, Lucius! do not speak so loud," said Aemilia, laying her hand on his mouth. "Do not mention names."

Piso took her hand, and looked at her a moment. "My poor Aemilia!" he said, and turned away.

"You have told us what we knew," said Cornelia, who had with difficulty restrained herself till now. "Tell us what we do *not* know. Is there nothing else? Is no one thinking of acting now the tyrant is away? Is no one preparing anything?"

"No, Cornelia. What would be the use?" replied Arulenus. "There are sixteen thousand Praetorians in the camp by the Rampart of Tullius."

"They have revolted before," said Cornelia between her teeth.

"Domitian gives them largesses and shows to their hearts' content," said Arulenus. "Galba was too parsimonious. Domitian is more cunning. The wealth which he squeezes out of his victims—the estates he confiscates—the legacies he compels men to leave him, that their children may be permitted to enjoy the residue of their inheritance—where do you suppose it all goes?"

"To his mistresses and his vile favourites—to Stephanus, and Parthenius, and Heliodorus—to Sergius the gladiator, and Porphyrion the charioteer, and Carpophorus the wild-beast slayer, and Earinus the eunuch," said Cornelia, with the bitterest contempt and hatred in her tone.

"Yes; but also to the Praetorians," said Arulenus. "He that can gain the Praetorians is master of the world, Cornelia; and the Praetorians and the rabble

are on Domitian's side. The Senate trembles before him—the Roman Senate, which conquered the world! Good men hate him; but the populace idolize him—as they have ever idolized the worst of men. Was not Clodius their idol, too? They loved Caligula, they loved Nero, and they love Domitian; he does not hurt *them*. On the contrary, he gives them corn, and suppers, and spectacles; and they would see the whole Senate dragged off to the Tarpeian together without a remonstrance. Let him touch one of themselves, and he is lost; but till then he is safe, and we should but dash our heads against a wall. There is no hope, Piso. The curse of Caius Gracchus is come upon us."

"Caius Gracchus! You well name him, Arulenus," exclaimed Piso, bitterly. "He is the first author of our ruin. His golden tongue destroyed his country!"

"He abolished some great abuses, Piso," said Arulenus.

"By introducing greater," cried Piso, growing more excited. "He gave us the corruption of the many for the corruption of the few—the Knights for the Senate. The Knights! half of them publicans and freedmen! The corruption of the few is an evil that must soon correct itself—visible as it is to all, and bringing with it its own swift punishment in shame and infamy. But the many hide each

other; and where so many are guilty, no one is ashamed. And what is infamy to a freedman? When *he* returns home from taking a bribe, no images of his ancestors blush as he passes them. There are bad men in every class, Rusticus, and the larger the class the more bad men, and the more shameless. Talk not to me of Caius Gracchus, when the Italians with whom he threatened to overpower the Romans are these very Praetorian Guards who now bind Rome neck and heels to Domitian's chariot-wheel."

"But if their officers could be gained"—said Cornelia, meaningly.

"Mother," said Piso, "remember Chaerea."

"You are too scrupulous, Lucius," said Cornelia. "All things are lawful against tyranny."

"So Gracchus said, mother. His fate should be an eternal warning to those who think they can go thus far, but no farther. To gain his ends, he mixed himself up with men worse than himself, until the suspicion of the murder of Scipio Aemilianus clings to him for ever."

"Carbo did it," said Arulenus. "Cicero said so, and he was born but twenty years after, and must have known scores of contemporary persons."

"Gracchus was not clear," said Piso. "And the people knew it. Why did they oppose the inquiry,

but because they dreaded lest their idol should be found guilty? His very friends suspected him. But it matters little to me whose hand strangled Aemilianus —whether Sempronia's, or Caius's, or Carbo's. If it was Carbo, it all the more justifies me in refusing to be mixed up with men who will do dirtier work than I will stoop to myself."

"Then will you do nothing?" asked Cornelia. "Are we to cower patiently until he strikes?"

"I am a soldier," said Piso. "I would meet him in the field, if I could, man to man. It is possible that I might put myself at the head of an army; the German legions are disaffected. But what then? I should rend my country with civil war—if I was victorious—to be conspired against in my turn, as Galba was by Otho."

"Why should you not reign in safety and honour, and leave the empire to your sons, as Vespasian did?" said Cornelia.

"Mother! these ambitious schemes have no charms for me," said Piso, with a gesture of passionate refusal. "I do not desire to reign. If I could restore the ancient state of Rome——"

"That is impossible, Piso; even Thrasea saw that," said Arulenus, quickly. "If you restored the Republic, there would only be another Pompey and another Caesar, with, at last, another Augustus."

Cornelia looked at Arulenus, and then at her son. "Brutus and Cassius," she said, in a low voice, "were accounted illustrious for slaying the great Julius. It is not difficult to *do*; it is only difficult to *resolve*."

"Mother," said Piso, earnestly, "I implore you to have nothing to do with such designs. You know not what you do—what engines you may set in motion, which may rebound and crush you."

Cornelia seemed about to speak, but she checked herself so far as only to ask abruptly of Arulenus, "Is Nerva in Rome?"

"Yes," he replied. "His favour with Domitian has apparently not diminished. It is a wonder, for it has got about that he has an imperial nativity."

"Ha! has he?" exclaimed Cornelia, her face flushing.

"These things are mere idle tales, of course," observed Arulenus—who, knowing that Cornelia was extremely superstitious, wished to discourage any importance being attached to his words; "but they are rendered serious because Domitian believes in them. Nerva, however, is so inoffensive—the Nervae have all such a character for mildness—that I hope the good old man will not incur any suspicion on this account. At any rate, Domitian is for the present far enough away, and it may be long before he

returns. He may, like Nero, choose to make a Progress in Greece—or he may visit Asia. Perhaps Fortune may surprise us with a deliverance we do not expect. Meanwhile, let us forget public calamities a little, and consider our private affairs. And tell me first whether Aulus Atticus is really to be our charming Calpurnia's husband?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE VINTAGE.

On all the vine-clad slopes of Campania the vintage was going on. Men and youths, women and girls, and even children, their bare arms and legs stained with the grape juice to as deep a dye as that of their scanty dark-coloured tunics, gathered the grape-clusters, and piled them in baskets. Piso, going up with Arulenus to visit one of his vineyards, met a whole train of these bearers—like a Bacchic procession—coming one after another along the narrow paths, stepping from terrace to terrace, their swarthy faces empurpled with the juice which ran through the wicker baskets.

"Good day, Piso! A happy vintage!" said the first.

"I thank you," returned Piso, standing aside to let the procession pass. "Surely, Arulenus, there is no sight like it," he said, watching the easy motion of the vintagers, as they swung along—their figures thrown out in clear relief against the yellow hillside and the brilliant morning sky. "The vintage seems

to me to be the culmination of Nature—her inexhaustible wealth and fertility are typified in these purple grapes; in them she gives us her very life-blood. All the sunshine of the year is imprisoned within them, ready to be set free and make glad the heart of man."

"You should write an ode, Piso, in praise of good wine," said Arulenus.

"You smile, Arulenus. You think I show a boyish delight in this spectacle. Perhaps it is because for so many years in Britain I did not see it. But I cannot tell you how profound is the emotion it stirs within me—how keen a sense of life it awakens. Every year, as the vintage comes round, this sense of infinite life and richness in Nature strikes me anew with wonder and delight. In identifying himself with this life, might not a man get rid of his cares, and grow as a tree—perpetually drawing life from Nature's breast, rocked on her mighty heart—instead of feeling, as I so often do, that the feast of life is going on without me, I thrust aside, and scarcely allowed even to look on?"

"I understand you, Piso," said Arulenus, pressing his hand. "But yet Nature is not all sunshine and harvest. She, too, has her cataclysms. Look there." He pointed across the bay to the blackened heaps at the foot of Vesuvius.

"Yes," replied Piso, as they began to mount the hill once more. "And slowly Nature will repair her own destructions, and after a thousand ages the grass will grow there again, and new cities will arise. Nature can afford to wait; she never grows old. But for *us*, the desolation yonder is eternal."

They were in sight of the vineyard, which rose in terrace above terrace on a hill facing the sea. The broad vine-leaves, flecked with autumn's red and gold, stirred slightly by the morning breeze, seemed to be softly clapping their hands for joy that their fruit was now to be made into wine. The little heads of Bacchus, hanging from their branches, swung gently to and fro, and a huge red and green dragon, with claw upraised, and a long crocodile mouth, set to frighten the birds, looked terrible enough to have guarded the golden apples of the Hesperides. On the lowest terrace, a number of mules were being laden with grapes. Presently a half-naked boy took the first by the mane, and led him down the rough and narrow path. The rest followed in line; then came a string of vintagers; and so the jovial procession went down the hill to the sound of a flute and a rustic chorus in praise of Father Liber.

"This would have been a sight to cheer old Cato's heart," said Arulenus, as the figures disappeared.

"He would have been reckoning up how many

great sesterces his wine would bring him in," replied Piso. "For my part, I could never bring myself to admire his character. He was, no doubt, an upright man; but so harsh and forbidding that he makes virtue seem hateful. There was none of that humanity about him which is so divine a feature in the Scipios. Indeed, the commercial speculator appears in all he did. Even his virtues were without elevation. To me he is a narrow-minded, sordid, short-sighted husbandman, whose sole object was to get as much out of his furrows as possible, and who loved money for its own sake, and not for the enjoyments it brings. And his malignant hatred of the Scipios—— "

"Ah, Piso, there lies the true reason for your dislike," said Arulenus. "You can never forgive him for hating the Scipios."

"Why should I forgive him for opposing the noblest citizens of Rome?" asked Piso, hotly. "Men whose elevation of character as far surpassed his as their genius surpassed his narrow, one-sided understanding! Search his life and his writings; will you find there one generous or human trait? We deify him, because he abstained from taking bribes in Sardinia. What shall be said, then, of Aemilianus? As for Cato, his highest statesmanship was the annihilation of Carthage, and his panacea for immorality, to prevent people reading Greek."

"He changed his opinion about that in his old age," said Rusticus.

"Yes," replied Piso; "Greece conquered the fierce old man at last. But I cannot love him, nor even much admire him. His brutal treatment of his slaves disgusts me. So do his commercial speculations. A Roman senator trafficking in slaves! Depend upon it, Arulenus, money was at least as dear to Cato as the ancient virtue he was always commending. He had all the instincts of a freedman; at heart he was no better than a trader. How can you reconcile his denunciations of usury as a kind of murder, with his lending money to the Companies at nautical interest?"

"I cannot," said Arulenus. "The only parts of his character that I admire are his personal incorruptibility and his steady opposition to the growing luxury of the age he lived in. Our frightful luxury——"

"Did not come to us from Greece," said Piso, interrupting him. "The Greeks have too much good taste to abase themselves below the level of the beasts as we do."

"This is the last load of the vineyard, Piso," said the overseer, coming up to his master, and pointing to another string of mules just beginning to descend.

"That is good; earlier than I expected," replied Piso. "But they are ready for you at the presses,

for I went there to make sure before I came up here. Shall we go, Arulenus?"

When Piso and Arulenus reached the more level ground at the foot of the hill, whence a road led to the farms, they found a scene even gayer and more bustling than that in the vineyard. Everywhere lay the grapes, and everywhere men, women, boys, and girls were loading themselves or their beasts with them. Both men and women sat astride the asses and mules, between the great panniers, the women clinging with their feet to the animals' necks; while on their heads, or in their arms, they held another well-filled basket. There were children everywhere—perched behind the loads, in front of the loads, on the necks of the oxen, and on the sides of the waggons. Half a dozen naked urchins were dancing around a heap of grapes, vine leaves stuck into their tangled hair; and another, who might have been the infant Bacchus himself, had just upset a basket of grapes, and was slyly looking through his fingers to see if any one had observed him.

"This is as great a vintage as that of the Consul Opimius, Piso," remarked the overseer, wiping his sweaty brow with the back of his hand. "How warm it is! We shall have a storm; it is too hot for October. We must come back for the rest," he continued, looking at the purple heaps around

him. "Every mule and ass and waggon have been fetched, and still there is a score of baskets over."

"Put one more on each waggon, Pansa," said Piso, "and put the rest into those great tubs, and Arulenus and I will carry them between us."

"That is well said, Piso. It brings luck when the master helps to carry the vintage home," said Pansa, while he was obeying Piso's order.

A very aged woman had come up, mounted on an ass, which was led by a girl.

"A happy vintage, Piso!" she called out, in the broken treble of extreme old age. "Permit me to kiss your hand. This is the last vintage I shall ever see."

"You said so last year, Marulla, and the year before that," said Piso. "I hope we shall see you here next year, at as good a vintage as this one."

"No, no," said the old crone, shaking her head. "I was born the year Augustus died. I've seen a many come and go since then. I've seen Tiberius and Caius—ah, a pretty young man *he* was, and that was a joyful day when he set out for Rome, to go and be made emperor! And the bridge he made over the sea here was the finest sight ever I saw! To see him, all dressed in pure gold, go riding over it, that *was* a sight! They did say he went off his head, poor dear chicken, when he got to Rome; but I shall

always say he was a sweet young prince when *I* saw him."

"I suppose," said Piso to Rusticus, when the old woman was out of hearing, "that Cato would have had me send old Marulla to the Sacred Island ten years ago. And now let us see how great a burden we can carry."

Two large tubs were being rolled along by half a dozen youths, who seemed to think this an excellent joke. Rusticus, laughing, laid hands on the smaller of the tubs, which was soon filled, and lifted to his head. Piso ordered the larger tub to be piled as high as possible.

"It will soon be as heavy as Milo's bull, Piso," said Pansa.

"If I cannot carry it, Pansa, you shall lend a hand," returned Piso, who seemed to have completely thrown off his melancholy, and to be carried away by the spirit of the vintage.

"You are still Piso *Frugi*," said Arulenus. "To see you now, you appear as engrossed in agricultural affairs as old Cato himself."

"Farming is the most ancient and most honourable of all occupations," said Piso. "It is the root of the tree. It is the only one of all man's undertakings free from remorse and ambition. Its disappointments can, at the worst, last but a year, and its joys

are not spoiled by the envy and hatred which sully all other triumphs. Fill higher, Pansa; I will try if I cannot carry as much as an ox can."

Three men, with much trouble, lifted the tub to Piso's head; and then his great strength became apparent. He took his place in the middle of the line of waggons, as though he had been only carrying one of the baskets; and, striking up the Hymn of Bacchus, the whole procession started along the rough farm road, and wound its way past olive-yards and groves of arbutus, and between the gently rising hills, until, at a sharp turn, they saw the farms, with the houses of the *villani*, dotted up and down the slope, and were met by another procession—Cornelia and Aemilia, with Julius, Quintus, and Calpurnia, and all the household slaves of the villa, in festal garments, and crowned with ivy and laurel. At the head of the slaves, marched the janitor Midas, a gigantic Phrygian, carrying little Tertia, Piso's youngest child. She was perched upon his shoulder, her rounded limbs showing like marble itself against Midas's sinewy red neck, her close-curling hair, like rings of bronze, crowned with vine-leaves. As she stretched out her arms, and shouted, "A happy vintage! a happy vintage, father!" the infant Bacchus himself was not more beautiful. She seemed the symbol of the vintage, the embodiment in human

shape of all the richness and vigour of the wealthy vine. Her purple hair seemed to be dyed in the luscious grape-juice; she had twined a vine-branch round one of her dimpled arms.

"Behold the Genius of the vintage!" said Rusticus.

And Tertia laughed aloud, and cried more merrily than ever, "A happy vintage! a happy vintage!" as the procession halted in front of the wine-presses.

The wine-presses and buildings connected with them were on the slope of a hill, carefully cleared of trees, lest their roots, penetrating under the earth, should taint the wine in the cellars. A stream which found its way down this hill had been diverted so as to turn the water-wheel which set in motion the simple machinery of the presses. Already the bare-legged wine-pressers were trampling out the purple blood of the grapes. Presently they leaped down, and, at a given signal, the great beams, creaking and groaning, began to go slowly round, while the wine-pressers laughed and sang in a joyful chorus, and danced among the beams. A great shout greeted Piso's arrival. The pressers left their dance, and ran to relieve him and Rusticus of their burdens; others emptied the waggons and unloaded the beasts, and Quintus, carried away by the universal rejoicing, threw off his shoes, and, springing into one of the presses, began treading with the best.

"He is truly a noble figure of a man, Cornelia," said Rusticus, as they watched Piso piling the presses with grapes. "His body is as vigorous as his mind, and his mind as vigorous as his body. It is an eternal disgrace that such a man should be lost to the state!"

CHAPTER VII.

A FOREIGN SUPERSTITION.

"Is there really nothing on foot among the better people in Rome?" asked Cornelia, stepping back a little, as if to rest against the wall of the enclosure.

"The better people feel that they are powerless, Cornelia; that, if they destroyed the present man, it would but clear the way for the Praetorians to set up another like him in his place."

"Would they not accept Flavius Clemens?" said Cornelia. She spoke very low, and, like Rusticus, carefully avoided mentioning the emperor's name.

"Clemens withdraws himself more and more from public life," replied Rusticus. "He is to be put up for Consul, they say; but many think he will decline to stand. The cruel fate of his brother has, no doubt, deterred him from seeking honours which might prove equally fatal to himself. Then, too, his infatuation for this foreign superstition——"

"I could not ask you last night before the servants,

and afterwards I forgot it," said Aemilia, who had been listening in silence. "But is it true that he has turned Jew? Silius won't believe it; but when Fabius Justus came down in the summer, he assured us it was quite true."

"No; he has not turned Jew," replied Rusticus. "That is, the Jews hate the sect he has joined as much as all the world hate the Jews, and as the Jews hate all the world. Of course, it is kept very quiet; for though Romans have before now become Jews, no one but Poppaea ever went unpunished. The fact is, he has joined the sect of the Christians."

"No!" exclaimed Cornelia and Aemilia, both in such extreme astonishment that they raised their voices a little.

"A fact, I assure you," continued Rusticus, in the same cautious undertone, which, as no one was within a dozen yards of them, could not be overheard. "*You* are probably aware, Cornelia, that Pomponia Graecina, the wife of Plautius, had secretly joined that sect? Nero consented to hush it up, and permit Plautius and her relations to judge her in private; and Plautius, who was devoted to her, pronounced her innocent. She died, you know, at a great age, ten years ago."

"I saw her in my youth," said Cornelia. "She was a friend of my mother's; but they had a quarrel.

I never knew what it was about. My mother died soon after. I remember Pomponia well—a tall, dignified person, always in mourning for her cousin Julia, Drusus's daughter, whom Claudius put to death. I have heard the rumour you allude to; but I could never believe it of so virtuous a matron as Pomponia."

"I do not believe half the stories about the Christians," continued Rusticus. "From all that I can learn, they are perfectly harmless people. The sect seems to have originated among the very dregs of humanity; an artificer of some kind founded it. They appear to me to be a sort of Cynic philosophers, if such low, illiterate persons can be called philosophers. Flavius would not say much about them; but I gathered that they look on everything as happening to a man for the best and by the will of the Gods, and think therefore a man should rejoice even in the midst of pain and sorrow."

"Why, uncle, they must be Stoics, then," said Aemilia. "That is exactly what the Stoics say. We had Artemidorus here not long ago, and he was insisting that the wise man would be happy even in Phalaris's bull."

"My dearest Aemilia," said Rusticus, fondly patting her hand, "I trust you do not imagine that these Christians deserve the name of Stoics, because, having nothing to lose—for most of them are the very lowest

of the low—they work themselves into a frenzy of contempt for life? Not such is the Stoic's superiority to chance and change; *he* maintains a lofty calm, born of philosophical meditation on the beauty and sublimity of virtue; and when he speaks of being happy in Phalaris's bull—which is perhaps an injudicious hyperbole, since we must admit that severe pain *can* for the time distract the attention, he means that all things are as nothing to him compared with virtue. I am sorry our Piso is so much of an Epicurean, Cornelia—a school which is not ashamed to appeal to persons incapable by nature of understanding what philosophy really is. It is the glory of the Stoic to appeal only to the select souls; but Epicurus actually makes it his boast that the common herd can understand his doctrines!"

All this while Piso appeared to have forgotten everything else in his anxiety that the juice should flow freely into the "lake," or lower press, and that the dolia were prepared in the cellar below. At the same time, he gave orders that the leaden caldrons should be brought out, the iron poles and chains fixed in place, and the firewood laid ready, that they might take advantage of there being no moon that night, to boil down some of the must into sapa, to be used in the making of mulsum. Then there was a great washing and rinsing of the empty amphorae, Piso

himself tasting the water as it was poured away, to make sure that no sediment remained to spoil the new wine. Other amphorae were to be filled with must, which was always to be kept sweet. These were pitched both inside and out, and, as soon as the must had been carefully poured in from an earthen jug with a long spout, the mouth of the amphora was hermetically sealed with cement, and it was carried into the cellar, where it was buried in wet sand, to remain there for six or eight weeks, after which it would keep a year. In another cellar, half buried in the earth, lay the long rows of vats, coated with pitch, to receive the must which was to ferment itself into the brave Falernian wine. In all the cellars there was a refreshing smell of myrrh.

"We do not get on very fast, Piso, at this rate," remarked Pansa, as the vats were being filled.

"My wine is better than my neighbours'," said Piso, "not because my vines are of a better sort than theirs—this dolium is full enough; there must be room for the fumes to escape, or it will burst—but because I crush my grapes, and do not trust to the fermentation to burst them for me, because I take care to wash out my vessels well, and because I pour the must in little by little, as it flows from the press, and do not wait, as some do, till the lake is full. By this means I avoid the violent commotion of the

liquor, which makes the fermentation in its turn set in violently, instead of creeping on gently and insensibly."

"Your method makes good wine, Piso; but we are twice as long about it as any of our neighbours," returned Pansa.

"It is not what is quickly done, but what is well done," said Piso. "Nature, our great exemplar, should teach us that; she is never in a hurry."

"It does not matter so much to her if she is too late," replied Pansa. "All this fuss about washing the vessels a dozen times, where every one else is satisfied with three or four, may be all very well; but for *my* part, I think our wine is the best because our grapes are the best, and because the blessing of Father Liber is on our vineyards, and I shall always believe it would be just as good if we gave ourselves half as much trouble."

"Last year, half of Silius's wine went sour," observed an assistant, who was just fitting on a cover to a vat.

"That was because he boiled his must when there was a moon," said Pansa, sharply. "The dolia were all right; it was only the sapa that went bad. You talk about what you understand," continued the irate overseer, as Piso was called out to settle the number of amphorae to be filled for sweet wine. "Leave

these questions to me and your master, who know what we are talking about."

Having thus crushed the presumption of his subordinate, Pansa addressed himself to the vital question of covering the vats, which if not done properly would spoil all.

At noon every one took a hasty meal in the press-room, and after it a brief siesta. Piso and Arulenus strolled up the hill, and sat there, looking over the sea.

"Maurieus is at his own vintage, or he would be here," observed Piso. And, after a pause, he added, "I know not, Rusticus, whether this harmless country life be not the best for man. I have of late—seeing that my own prime is passing, and that before very long I must begin to look back, instead of forward—been pondering deeply on that philosophy which bids us cease from all far-off, and perhaps unattainable aims, and be content with life itself, asking no more than ease from pain. Do not let your Stoic anger rise——"

"Nay, Piso, I was only about to say that the Epicureans themselves have quarrelled as to whether the chief happiness be in ease, or in ease after pain. Those of them who admit that ease after pain is the chief happiness, admit the whole thing, and knock their own philosophy on the head."

"Of course they do," said Piso; "they confess that effort is necessary to happiness. But do not call me an Epicurean."

"Have you, then, quarrelled with Lucretius? I always prophesied you would——"

"Do not misunderstand me," said Piso, smiling at Arulenus's eagerness. "I have long been struck by the vast superiority of Lucretius's theory of the universe to his theory of morals. He says, you know, that motion is essential to life—

"'Atoms never end their race,'

and if there were a lowest, things would soon come to rest in chaos."

"He is only saying things must have room to move," said Arulenus; "and he stole it all from Democritus, and spoiled it in the stealing. Heracleitus, with his Ebb and Flow, is a far profounder thinker than either of them."

"At any rate," continued Piso, "he makes motion necessary to life, and yet in his morals he is for ever praising ease. To sit beneath a myrtle, and listen to the murmur of the stream, this is his chief good. Well may he say that man's life is like pouring water into a sieve that leaks, and well may Cicero, and Aristotle before him, say that such a chief good is the good of a sheep, and not of a man."

"Lucretius has dressed the philosophy of Epicurus in verse so noble, that we sometimes forget how base are the sentiments," said Arulenus. "But he is even baser than his master; Epicurus does rise sometimes—as when he says that only the virtuous man can be happy, and again when he says that a good friend is the best gift of the Gods. But from end to end, Lucretius is base!"

"I alternately admire and condemn him," said Piso.

"I admire nothing in him but his good verses," said Arulenus. "How full he is of contradictions! Now going into rhapsodies over the universe, now telling us it is so badly contrived that the Gods neither made it nor care about it. And what can be more clumsy than his account of the creation of the beasts? He ridicules the idea of the Gods creating lions and elephants, but gravely tells us that Mother Earth, in her buxom prime, brought forth birds and beasts, just as now on a hot day she brings forth fleas."

"The Stoic doctrine is lofty and disinterested," said Piso, after a pause; "but it is too narrow. There is no place in it for the arts. A complex civilization such as ours requires a more liberal system. I am an intellectual, as well as a moral being, and I find half my nature left out of your philosophy."

"Does not Epicurus, hen, leave out half your nature—and the nobler half?" cried Rusticus. "*We* limit you with talk of duty; *he* with talk of pleasure. We renounce those things we do renounce from the loftiest, he from the basest motive. He strikes at the two strongest incentives to virtue, the fear of the Gods and the love of fame, and dies desiring his disciples to keep his birthday."

"How much wiser were our fathers!" said Piso. "They troubled themselves but little about philosophy, but they believed that the Gods punished iniquity and rewarded virtue, and that he was most happy who served his country best. Theirs was the noblest stoicism, for it was stronger than love of life or fear of death. Would to the Gods, Arulenus, I had died like them; would to the Gods, I had fallen beneath the scythes of the Britons! It is not death, but an unhonoured life that I fear! If he would send me against the Sarmatians——"

"You might return at the head of the legions," said Arulenus.

"We are helpless," said Piso. "We should but set up a new tyrant—Casperius or Norbanus."

"Or your cousin Publius," said Arulenus.

Piso looked at him. "Ha! you think then——"

"That he would wait while you acted, and then act while you waited."

"The hour for rest is past; let us return to our vats," said Piso, rising—and to Arulenus, although he was not a superstitious man, the words sounded ominous.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HE HAS NO DESIRES, AND THEREFORE HE IS WISE."

It was but a very short distance from the wine-presses to the villa, and after supper, Piso went back to see that the fires were kindled, and not burning too fiercely. Quintus had asked permission to go too, and as they reached the turn in the road, a curious and romantic scene burst upon them. The fires were burning in the clearing above the wine-presses, and the whole hillside was illuminated by the ruddy glare, across which fell the long black shadows of Pansa and his myrmidons. They were busy skimming the scum off the seething must with walnut leaves, throwing more wood on the fires, or raking the flaming twigs away where they burned too fiercely. There was something strange and unearthly in the way these dark figures flitted about the fires, now lighted up as the flames shone on their faces, and now showing out black against the firelight, but always weird and unfamiliar.

Piso and Quintus stood still to watch this scene—which from a little distance had something phantasmagorial about it—when he saw some one approaching. The noise made by the people at the fires, though sounding hollow from distance, had yet prevented Piso from hearing a footstep until the stranger was close upon them; and as he was wrapped in a dark-coloured cloak, Quintus, whose eyes were fixed on the hillside, was much startled by a voice saying in his ear—

"Do I speak to Lucius Piso?"

"It is I," replied Piso, hastily. "Quintus, go on and tell Pansa the third fire to your right is burning too fiercely. I will follow you directly; but here is a person who wishes to speak with me."

He waited until Quintus had got into the circle of the light, and was far out of hearing, and then said, in a tone of some impatience—

"What is it, Demetrius? What means this mysterious meeting? If you have anything to say, why can you not come to me openly?"

"Because, Piso, I have that to say which I must be certain is not overheard, and because I know that walls have ears."

"What have you to say?" asked Piso.

Demetrius laid his hand on Piso's arm. "Are you going to Rome, Piso?" he asked.

"No," returned Piso. "You know as well as I do that Caesar *advised* me to remain here, and that my return would be construed as treason."

"Ay, if you returned openly," said Demetrius, with meaning.

Piso was silent.

"Then you will do nothing to deliver your country?" asked Demetrius, tightening his grasp on Piso's arm.

"I do not—I will not—understand you, Demetrius," answered Piso. "If you desire to entrap me, I am not to be entrapped. If you are, as I think, an honest man, I tell you that you are but digging a pit into which you will fall, with all whom you may persuade to listen to you."

"The Pisos are very good, or very bad," said Demetrius. "Which are you?"

"You tempt me in vain, and you taunt me in vain," replied Piso. "If my life could benefit my country, I would lay it down, how joyfully only I and the Gods know. But what you hint at is madness. If it succeeded, it would but end in the deaths of many good men and the proclaiming of a new tyrant. But it would fail. The Praetorians to a man would stand by Domitian."

"Your name, Piso—your family—your exploits in Britain—the legions would rally round you——"

"The legions that know me are in Britain," said Piso. "Agricola bent his head to destiny——"

"Destiny may be bent. Apollonius says that a man's will is his destiny," said Demetrius. "And it is true. As the will, so is the man."

They had been speaking almost in whispers, Demetrius with great vehemence, Piso with the air of a man who has made up his mind.

"Then you will do nothing?" asked Demetrius, as Piso stood silent.

"I will not be the cause of shedding blood to no purpose, Demetrius."

"Listen, Piso!" said Demetrius, with an earnestness which was undoubtedly genuine. "You are right in saying that the Praetorians carry the fate of Rome in their scabbards. But you are a soldier; you were Agricola's favourite Tribune; your name would be acceptable to the legions. You say well, a conspiracy of the Senate is madness. Lend your name, and the conspiracy becomes one of the Praetorians. Do you think *they* are deceived by his sham Dalmatians from the Gladiators' Schools? *You*, Piso, you, who fought with Agricola—you, whose reputation is as blameless as Nerva's, and who are as stout a soldier as Ulpius Trajanus——"

"You, not I, have uttered their names, Demetrius. But have you ever dared to speak thus to *them?*"

"Trajan is in Germany, and will not be such a fool as to return, as Agricola did, to the lion's den," said Demetrius. "Nerva is a good man, like all his house; and, like them, would not hurt a fly—in which he does not resemble our imperial master. He is a favourite with Domitian. Domitian is glad to have so venerable a man for his friend; it is a rebuke to Arulenus, and Senecio, and the others of that party. By-the-by, Piso, warn Rusticus to keep his panegyric of Thrasea to himself, and not to read it at the house of Senecio, as he intends to do."

"I know nothing of it," said Piso. "He has said nothing to me."

"He will; he has got it with him. And now I will tell you something else." He dropped his voice to a whisper. "Nerva has an imperial nativity, and Domitian knows it, and that is why he shows him so much favour."

"These superstitious follies, Demetrius, do not give you more credit in my eyes," said Piso, remembering at this moment the unfavourable opinion Silius Italicus had expressed of the philosopher. "Nor do I see how that could account for Domitian's favour."

"He dares not—even *he* dares not—strike one so innocent, so illustrious—and so old," returned Demetrius. "He keeps him near him, to watch him. And now what will you do? Will you go to Rome—

I will get you there unseen. Confer secretly with the Senate, who will send for the Praefects of the Prætorians, as if to communicate to them privately some important matter. Then the doors of the Senate-house will be closed, and the Senate will give the Praefects their choice of instant death or of swearing allegiance to the Senate. A great bribe will also be offered. If they agree—and do you think Norbanus and Petronius will refuse a bribe, if it be large enough? —they will be made to write letters to the soldiers, commanding them to obey the Senate. Then you will go to the camp, and make a speech to them, reminding them of Decebalus and the disgrace of our arms, of Domitian's sham triumphs over an enemy he never dared look in the face, of Agricola's glory snatched from him. And if you will not offer yourself as their emperor, to lead them against Decebalus, offer yourself merely as their general, and restore the Republic. What think you of the plan?" Demetrius asked the question with an elation he could not conceal, and which, had the issue been less serious, would have made Piso smile. But he answered gravely—

"I think, Demetrius, that the Senate saw Thrasea dragged from its midst, that it saw Elvius Agrippa strangled, that it voted Domitian a triumph for conquering Decebalus——" Piso had spoken calmly

till now; but at the name of Decebalus his voice broke, and he said abruptly, "Finish the list of our disgraces yourself, Demetrius—you are not a Roman; but do not ask me to count on the courage of the Senate, which trembles at the sound of Domitian's footstep."

"Immense bribes would be offered to the Praetorians," said Demetrius. "This would gain time, and, the first moment of irresolution past, the Senate would recover its ancient firmness."

"We have had too many bribes. I will have nothing to do with a liberty that is to be bought with sesterces," said Piso; and Demetrius knew that he would not prevail with him. "You talk of the Senate. Are not Regulus, and Certus, and Veiento Senators? And now, hear me, Demetrius. For months past I have been assailed by these solicitations from you and others. The day before yesterday, in the Grotto of Pausilippo, a fellow who pretended to be drunk whispered seditious suggestions in my ear. If he is your accomplice, beware! You play a dangerous game."

"I have no accomplice," said Demetrius, more hastily than his former zeal against the tyrant seemed to justify. "I know nothing but what every one knows—except, perhaps, what I may learn by means not available to most men."

"You call yourself a philosopher, Demetrius," said Piso, with stern reproof. "I marvel that you can degrade yourself by allusions to magic arts. If you obtain your information from Apollonius of Tyana, see that you do not find yourself deluded to your own destruction by a clever impostor."

"The divine Apollonius is no impostor!" said Demetrius, angrily. "He is the best and the wisest of men, and if he knows more than they, it is not by means of what the vulgar call magic, but because he lives a life so pure and removed from earthly grossness, that his inner eye is opened, and he perceives things hidden from men immersed in pleasures of sense and projects of ambition and gain. He has no desires, and therefore he is wise. And now I have spoken, and you will not hear. On your own head be the consequences! But I will give you one last counsel. As soon as you hear the first rumour of Domitian's return, send a trusty messenger to tell your son not to set foot in Italy for another year. And one word more. You are writing a history of the Senate. Let not Domitian hear of it. The very name of the Senate stinks in his nostrils."

Without waiting for any reply, Demetrius turned abruptly from Piso, and strode away in the darkness along the road he had come, leaving Piso at once angry and alarmed. But he showed nothing of this

as he gave orders to Pansa, and with his own hands raked at the fires, and dipping in a twig of walnut, tried how much the must had diminished in the caldrons.

But all the while, and all the way home, while he talked with Quintus as though his heart were only in the vintage, that saying of Demetrius would ring in his ears—"He has no desires, and therefore he is wise."

Piso was by no means sure that Demetrius knew as much as he pretended. It was therefore a disagreeable shock to him when Arulenus said, as they walked before supper in the Portico of the Muses, whence they had a magnificent view of the bay—

"All this while, Lucius, I have neither asked you what progress you make with your *History of the Senate*, nor told you that I have composed a Panegyric on Thrasea. I have it with me, and will read it to you, if you will not think me tedious. I am to recite it at the house of Herennius Senecio. Fannia has asked *him* to write a life of her husband."

"I hope you will be careful whom you invite to hear it," remarked Piso. "May I ask if you have told any one of your intention?"

"Only those few friends, such as Plinius Secundus and others, whom I can absolutely trust."

"And yet," said Piso—and he glanced round him and spoke low—"I was told but a few hours since that you had written the panegyric, and were to read it at Senecio's."

Rusticus flushed red, and then turned pale. "Who told you?" he asked. "A friend or an enemy?"

"He calls himself a friend. It was Demetrius the Cynic."

"Ha!" exclaimed Rusticus. "My brother Mauricus always will have it that that fellow is not hanging about here for nothing. Now the philosophers are banished from Italy, it is a bold thing for him to stay here. Indeed, I wonder Domitian, who hears everything by his spies, has overlooked it. His former friendship with Thrasea makes him rather a marked man. That is a long while ago, to be sure—five-and-twenty years. I know many believe him to be in correspondence with that extraordinary person, Apollonius of Tyana."

"A charlatan—a magician!" said Piso.

"No; you mistake," replied Rusticus. "Apollonius is a Pythagorean. In India, he learned all the wisdom of the Brahmans. He is a great philosopher, and if he does possess more than mortal powers—which is mere report—he at any rate never lays claim to them. Nor does he ever seek gain. But that he in Ephesus pulls some strings in Rome is what many

suspect, though I have never been able to arrive at any solid reasons for their suspicions."

"The air is thick with cobwebs, Rusticus," said Piso. "My mother would say, 'Brush them aside——'"

"But in doing so you would discover that they cling to iron chains and bars," interrupted Rusticus. "I tell you that the Senate would sit trembling, while you and I, and all our friends, were dragged off to prison. The time has not come. If it does come, I will be the first to call on my countrymen to rise and fight for their liberties."

As Rusticus said this, a servant was seen approaching, and as soon as he came near, he informed Piso that Publius Calpurnius Crassus, just arrived at Puteoli from Ephesus, on his way to Rome, was coming to visit his cousin.

"Send a dozen of the household slaves out to meet him, order the bath to be heated, and prepare supper in the Diana," said Piso. And as soon as the great folding-doors had swung to behind the servant, he said to Rusticus significantly, "You will not be able to read us the panegyric to-night, nor would I recommend you to leave it open in your own chamber."

As Piso left the portico, he was met by Aemilia, who, in evident anxiety, said, as soon as she saw

him, "What does it mean, Lucius? Why is he coming?"

"He could scarcely go on to Rome without resting, and he could scarcely rest at Puteoli when his cousin is at Baiae," answered Piso. "Receive him with friendliness, Aemilia, and as those who have nothing to hide."

CHAPTER IX.

PUBLIUS CALPURNIUS CRASSUS.

Publius Calpurnius Crassus was Piso's cousin, through the connection of the Calpurnii with the Crassi. He was very rich, and he had the reputation of being very vicious. On this and other accounts, there had long been a great coolness between the cousins, and Piso was more surprised than he had admitted at this unexpected visit. Crassus had been absent for some months in the Aegean Isles, on one of which he had a splendid villa. He had, in fact, left Rome very soon after the emperor, with whom he was a favourite, went to Sarmatia, and it was another source of wonderment to Piso that he should have returned to Italy in winter, the emperor being still absent.

He had brought with him a great train of slaves, eight of whom carried his magnificent litter, which glittered with gold and ivory. He was excessively indolent—or at least affected to be so—for it was a

very difficult matter to say precisely what manner of man Calpurnius Crassus really was, although very easy to see what manner of man he desired other men to think him.

Piso received him with some state. Crassus had already removed all outward traces of travel, and appeared very elegantly attired in a dinner-robe of the finest Syrian texture, with gold fringes and long sleeves, which fell over his hands. A magnificently embroidered girdle bound the folds of his tunic. He wore his hair long, and his whole appearance betokened effeminacy, but effeminacy restrained by good taste. Even the perfumes which he diffused around him had so strange and subtle a fragrance that they seemed rather to belong to the atmosphere than to himself. And yet, as he returned the greetings of Piso and Aemilia, even a moderately keen observer might have been aware that a disagreeable moral enigma was being presented for his solution. The strong family resemblance between Calpurnius Crassus and his cousin Lucius Piso only made this enigma more disagreeable. It is possible for a very ugly countenance to be extremely like a very beautiful one, and Crassus was very much like a small and mean copy of Piso. Perhaps the effect was in reality rather spiritual than physical, and was due more to some deep-seated moral obliquity of purpose than to any

obliquity of physical conformation. And it was accordingly visible in direct ratio to the quickness of perception of the observer, and more especially to the share which the moral played in this perception. For instance, many commonplace persons of Crassus' acquaintance were accustomed to say nothing worse of him than that he had a keen face, and looked as though he could see through a brazen door; and would add that he would be rather a handsome man if he were not so thin. But Calpurnia, as she furtively watched him—her curiosity quickened by her grandmother's confidences—imagined she read in his face a whole volume of sinister purpose and dark intrigue. He was five or six years Piso's junior, and his slight, lithe figure made him seem still younger. He might indeed have passed very well for a man of only five or six-and-twenty, who, having lived hard, looked more than his age. One could never be quite sure whether Crassus were not in earnest when he seemed to jest; nor, on the other hand, whether he were not in jest when he seemed in earnest. On the present occasion, he played the man of the world, laying aside his mask of discretion in the society of his kinsfolk, to such perfection that Calpurnia's ears would have been deceived, if her eyes could have ceased to see that odd obliquity. Was it his nose which was on one side? Calpurnia asked herself. Or

was it his mouth? Or was it not rather the line of the brows and eyes? Or was it none of these, but some peculiarity in his smile? Or was it all fancy, born of the tales her grandmother told her of his attempting years ago to slander her father, of his cruelty to a slave who had displeased him, and of his participation in the Emperor's orgies—together with the other less authentic story that Crassus was implicated in a conspiracy against Titus, about whose death there had always been whispers?

"I drink to you, Lucius, and to you, Aemilia," said Crassus, leaning back gracefully on his elbow, and with his other hand clasping the cup of Falernian, his fingers literally covered with jewels. "What a pleasure to be in the bosom of one's family! And how pretty our Calpurnia is grown—quite a woman, too, and I'll engage with her little head busy already about lovers. But you do not guess, my little cousin, what a surprise I have for you."

"A surprise, cousin! What is it?" asked Calpurnia, her heart in her mouth, for no reason whatever, but because the eyes of Crassus, fixed on her, had such a keen amusement in them.

Crassus, when he was amused, had not a pleasant expression—there was too much of the cat's triumph in it, when she is just going to extend her paw and impound the unconscious fly.

"I will tell you after supper," he said, with an airy sportiveness which made Calpurnia detest him more than ever. "But you shall hear at once, Lucius, that your Caius and young Aulus Atticus came over to Teios while I was there. They are both grown—fine manly young fellows, both of them—and I assure you, could give us old fogies a lesson or two in living. Oh, don't look grave, Aemilia; your Caius is as virtuous as his great ancestor Scipio"—Calpurnia thought Crassus sneered as he said this—"and Aulus, if not precisely a Scipio, is—well, really I can't undertake to enumerate his virtues, there are so many of them. He has the handsomest face, the best-made figure, the most aristocratic bearing, and cuts his hair in the most becoming fashion that I have seen since I left the City. And as for his way with the women, it is perfectly irresistible—too irresistible, some might say, who are jealous of him, of course. As I told him, if he can be so delightful with the acquaintance of a day, what will he be when he comes to make love in earnest? What havoc he will work in Rome, to be sure! He will cut out even Sergius the gladiator, warts and all. Of course you have heard that our friend Veiento's wife has run away with poor dear Sergius?"

"She ought to be ashamed of herself. Such a disgustingly ugly man, too, they say, and quite old for

a gladiator," said Aemilia, who wished to turn the conversation from Aulus.

"*De gustibus*," said Crassus, shrugging his shoulders, as he helped himself daintily to the breast of a pheasant. "Clever fellow, Veiento. Read his book against the Gods, Lucius? Awfully witty."

"I do not admire Veiento's wit," said Piso, stiffly. "I dislike the man, and I do not think the subject conducive to public morals."

"Immortal Gods! public *morals*, my dear Lucius!" cried Crassus, immensely tickled. "Well, that's the neatest bit I've heard this long while."

"I confess, Publius," said Cornelia, who could no longer refrain from an encounter, though experience ought to have warned her she would surely come off the worse, "I do not see the point of the joke."

"That is it, dear cousin Cornelia," replied Crassus, apparently more tickled still. "That *is* the point, that it *has* no point. You see, public morals may be briefly described as non-existent. As I often say to Martial, 'You know, my good fellow, to write your epigrams, and then lug in the public morals, is—well, is a joke.' After all, Piso, I suppose we are all agreed that morals, like religions, are a kind of city-watch instituted to keep the rabble in order—and, on the whole, cheaper. But really, Veiento's book is worth reading. He has not left Jupiter a leg to stand

on, and the fun he makes of his thunderbolts is simply delicious. I nearly died of laughing."

Piso looked offended. Cornelia rose, and, taking Calpurnia by the hand, said, "Cousin Publius, I am sorry you have allowed yourself to blaspheme the Gods beneath our roof. May punishment not fall on our heads." And with this, she left the room.

Crassus feigned dismay. He shrugged his shoulders up to his ears, and sat as though expecting Piso to do as he bade him in jest—throw the glass jar of Falernian at his head by way of expiatory libation.

"After all, Lucius, I like the women to be religious," he said, as Piso was silent. "It makes them more amusing; and if they were not superstitious, they would soon cease to be afraid of us—eh, Aemilia? But you and I, Lucius, as men of the world and good Epicureans, laugh at all that. Rusticus looks grave. Let us pour a libation to Bacchus—a jolly young god, who had adventures. He will, I am sure, pardon my saying that a libation poured down the throat of a man honours him more than one wasted on marble floors. Come, Lucius, you are too grave. What says Democritus? The best wisdom lies in laughter. And if *we* do not laugh, who have shaken off the horrid incubus of the Gods, why who will? As Lucretius says—

"'If it once appear
That after death there's neither Hope nor Fear,
Then men might freely triumph.'

Death is a nasty thing, but inevitable—therefore never to be thought about by wise men. Oh, you can't think how funny Veiento is about Minos, and the trial of the souls in the Infernal Regions. How Martial did chuckle over it! By-the-by, what do you think of our little friend Martial, Lucius? He made a very neat verse just before I left Rome—about the people who pretend to be shocked. How did it run—

"'The women say, "Fie, fie!"
But yet they read me on the sly.'

Is that true, Aemilia? Do you read him on the sly?"

"You will think me very stupid, I am sure, Publius," replied Aemilia, "but I have never read any of Martial's verses."

"Ah, you read the Argonautics—old Valerius Flaccus. I remember seeing the book in your work-basket once," said Crassus, smiling sweetly. "But, tell me, Lucius, what *do* you think of Martial? Do you dislike his addressing so many compliments to our valiant and learned Emperor? Do you think them extravagant? I dare swear our excellent Rusticus's stoical stomach can't digest so much flattery of a prince. Yet, after all, it's true—in a way. For my part, I always thought Domitian a man of great taste.

If he had devoted himself to literature, he could have done something. Not like Nero, you know—Nero was a stick, and when he didn't crib his verses bodily, they were sad stuff. But Domitian undoubtedly has a quick intelligence. Pray give us your opinion, Lucius."

"I have been absent from Rome for eight years," replied Piso, with a great effort obeying Aemilia's imploring eyes, and controlling his indignation. "I only know what I am told—by you and others—so that my opinion could be only a repetition of yours and others'."

"There's great unanimity, then?" asked Crassus. "Now, to tell you the truth, Lucius, I always thought you disliked Domitian—and of course *I* don't defend all he has done. Too arbitrary, of course. He will make himself enemies if he is not rather more careful. I expect to hear some grumbling in Rome, eh, Rusticus? I expect some of them speak out, now Caesar is gone to gain more victories over the barbarians."

"I pay little attention to gossip, Crassus," replied Rusticus, who throughout supper had been very taciturn. "If you will pardon me, Piso, I will retire; I have a letter to write."

Rusticus withdrew, and so did Aemilia, Quintus, and Julius; and Piso and Crassus were left alone to finish their dessert, and try some very old Massic wine, of a famous vintage.

CHAPTER X.

AN EMBARRASSING DISCLOSURE.

"Rusticus is a great man, of course, but scarcely a convivial companion," observed Crassus, looking at the curtain as it slowly flapped. "Really your grapes are as fine as the best I tasted in Greece, Lucius. I must compliment you on the elegance of your table. In Rome, we go in for a somewhat vulgar profusion of dishes; our feasts smack too much of the supper of Trimalchio. *You* give your guests few dishes, but each one is a masterpiece."

"You took us by surprise, Publius, or you should have had better entertainment," returned Piso, not sure that a sneer did not lurk beneath this compliment. "There was no time to add anything to our usual fare."

"I am perfectly content with it, my dear Lucius, after a sea-voyage, even in fair weather—and what weather *is* fair at sea? A horrid element! But we are alone, and may speak freely. I may admit without

reserve to *you*, Lucius, that I am not blind to Domitian's faults. Personally, I preferred Titus, though I never flattered him like some I could name. I'll even go so far as to say that I think if a certain personage did *not* return from Sarmatia, it might not be a calamity for Rome. There are others, I know, who think so too, besides our good Rusticus, who, between you and me, shows his feelings and opinions a *little* too plainly."

Wickedness has many advantages over goodness, which often give it a temporary triumph. But it labours under one great disadvantage, which in the long run nearly always proves its ruin. It is the direct tendency of sin to blunt the moral perceptions, and this bluntness of perception sooner or later betrays the cleverest knave into betraying himself. A long habit of looking at objects through a distorted medium makes him forget that *some* people look at them through a clear one. Accordingly, little by little, he forgets how things appear to honest men; or, if he has sunk to that stage of the Inferno, in which a dishonest man has only one honest belief left—a belief that honesty does not exist—he is then more certain than ever soon to make some fatal mistake. It is always dangerous to despise one's enemy. Honesty is the mortal enemy of Roguery, and it is even more dangerous to Roguery to doubt the existence of

Honesty, than to Honesty to doubt the existence of Roguery.

Calpurnius Crassus was a man of excellent parts. He had a caustic wit, was a good judge of an epigram, and had even made one or two very pretty ones himself. He had a cool head, and was entirely free from prejudices of any kind. He affected some vices which he had not got—in order, said his enemies, to conceal others which he had. In short, he was a remarkably clever man, with an intimate knowledge of the world. And yet he had never been able to deceive any one—that is, to any useful end. His friends praised his dinners and his silver sideboards and his wit; but not one of them had ever told him his secrets. Crassus knew a good many secrets, but he always had to buy them, and doubtless it was this singular want of confidence shown towards himself which had given him the very poor opinion of mankind he was known to hold. He was as astute a man as could be found in Rome; but he was not astute enough to make anybody either like or love him. Even his mistresses were very moderately devoted to him. As for his wife—who was a sister of Aelius Plautius Lamia, the Empress Domitia's first bridegroom—she died very soon after her marriage, and Crassus had not replaced her. It was really a pity to marry and have children, when by so doing one lost half one's social impor-

tance—a childless widower, however unamiable, being courted by all the legacy-hunters in Rome—that is, by three-fourths of society.

Owing, then, to a certain dulness of perception, which is caused by a too-exclusive devotion to one's own interests, Crassus hoped that a few treasonable words like these he had just uttered would throw Piso off his guard, and he was quite disappointed when Piso, rising from the couch, said—with that stern fearlessness Crassus knew so well, and disliked so sincerely—

"I prefer, Publius, to make no reply to such language, except to disclaim any share in it."

Crassus half raised himself on his elbow. One quick glance of hatred had shot out of his eyes, but it was with well-feigned astonishment that he exclaimed—

"By Hercules, Lucius! Have you turned Caesar's friend, now Agricola is dead? A great loss to the State. You cannot imagine with what a shock I heard of it. What *did* he die of? Such contradictory reports are going about."

"The physicians said he died of a fever," replied Piso, mastering the anger which shook his voice in spite of himself. "But for this, and all else that you wish to know, Publius, you have only to go to Rome to learn all, from persons on whom you can rely."

Piso had no hidden meaning in speaking of persons on whom Crassus could rely; but Crassus, ever quick to suspect, looked at him sharply, and said—

"Ah! I suppose you mean Regulus and Veiento. They *do* know most things. Do you see Regulus often?"

"Never," said Piso, sternly.

"Ah! that's a mistake, dear Lucius. Now let me give you a word of advice." Here he leapt up from the couch, and came and laid his hand on Piso's arm, and slightly as Piso recoiled, Crassus perceived it, and entered it on those tablets of his memory more especially devoted to his rich and popular kinsman, whose next heir he might be, in certain contingencies. "Let me give you a word of advice, my dear Lucius —the younger to the elder, the idler to the soldier, the disciple to the master. Have I not looked up to you from my boyhood? Forgive a presumption prompted by care for your safety. Your name, Lucius, is being bandied about in Rome in a manner which is not for your health. Men talked of as you are have before now fallen sick and died —of fevers. 'Piso is a man born to rule.' 'Piso is so handsome, so rich, so illustrious by birth, was so distinguished in Britain under the great Agricola; he is so virtuous, too.' Now, Lucius, we must accept the facts of human nature. The Master of Thirty Legions—who has *not* distinguished

himself in Britain, who is *not* handsome, nor very illustrious by birth, and who has no violent pretensions to virtue, which he must keep up—such a Master of Thirty Legions, Lucius, is apt to grow impatient at hearing a nobleman's praises for ever dinned in his ears. Now, I have reason to know—to *know*, mark you, Lucius—that Regulus, and Certus, and our witty friend Veiento praised you a little injudiciously last spring. In short, Lucius, you are likely to be very soon drawn out of that safe obscurity which you have enjoyed in this truly imperial retreat." Here Crassus glanced up at the ivory ceiling of the room, painted with Diana discovering the sleeping Endymion. "You are very rich, and there are many who wish to see you in Rome, giving the princely entertainments proper to your fortune. But beware of envy; eulogists, Lucius, are the worst kind of enemies. Now, my advice to you is this: if you return to Rome, invite Regulus, Certus, Veiento, old Messalinus, and the rest of them, to your dinners, and contrive to make it worth their while to *leave off praising you* to Caesar. I should not wonder, now, if not one of them was ever yet a sestertius the better for all your wealth?"

"The men you have named, Publius, are all informers—advocates who have sold their eloquence to the highest bidder."

"Precisely so, dear Lucius; therefore, be you the highest bidder. Why do you hesitate? If a highwayman stopped you on the road, would you draw sword against him?"

"Certainly."

"And is not money a sword, only of a different kind? A sword would be of no use against Regulus—that is, you might kill him, of course; but as you would be sure to be executed for the murder, you would hardly be the gainer. But a judicious bribe, and a still more judicious *hope*—you take me, Lucius?"

"Why should I bribe any one, when I have done no wrong?" asked Piso, his wrath fast getting the better of his prudence.

"That is the very reason, Lucius," said Crassus. "Why, my dear cousin, you talk like a green girl. You are rich and virtuous; so was Thrasea. Regulus, and Veiento, and the rest of them feathered their nests very prettily with the pickings of *his* bones. They have only to wait till some fine day the treasury is low, and Domitian says he cannot afford to give his poor Romans a sea-fight; he will have to borrow some money; who can recommend him to a money-lender? You know how funny he is when he means mischief. Then Regulus will reply that if Caesar was not so ridiculously soft-hearted a prince, there is a noble Roman conspiring under his very

eyes, whose fortune would just come in handy. And after that, my dear Lucius," said Crassus, with a conviction in his tones which was perfectly genuine, "after that, I would not buy your chances for a silver denarius. Well, I have warned you. You are in a dilemma, Lucius. While Agricola lived, Caesar dared not strike you; but if Agricola had not caught that fever, I fancy he would not have lived very much longer." Crassus paused, and looked steadily at Piso, and repeated slowly, "No, I do not *think* he would have lived very much longer."

"Let us rejoin Aemilia," said Piso, who wished to put an end to a conversation whose real aim puzzled him; the only thing he was quite certain of being that his own safety was *not* dear to Crassus.

But Crassus detained him.

"Before we go, Lucius," he said, with some slight embarrassment, "as I must start for Rome to-night, and we shall have no other opportunity, let me speak of the real object of my visiting you thus uninvited. We have not always understood each other, Lucius—I was too frivolous; you, perhaps, too severe. But age brings wisdom; it has, at any rate, brought me wisdom enough to admire my cousin Lucius Piso more than I did even when I was a silly impetuous boy, and embraced him at the Milvian Bridge, when Agricola was setting out for Britain. And now I

have a petition which I scarcely dare make. I am unworthy—yet, perhaps not wholly unworthy, being of the same Calpurnian stock as yourself. My fortune is large enough for you not to suspect me there." He appeared to overcome some timidity, and then, with a certain formal politeness, which did not sit ill upon him, he said, looking full at Piso, "I beg you, Lucius, to grant me the hand of your daughter Calpurnia."

Piso started. "No," he said decisively. "It is impossible, Publius. And, indeed," he added in a more conciliatory tone, "she is contracted to Aulus Atticus."

"Not contracted, Lucius," said Crassus, with a gentle candour, in which there lurked a shade of respectful reproof. "Not contracted—I asked Aulus myself, and he told me no ceremony had taken place."

"But it is understood—I have pledged my honour—subject to their inclinations, for I will not force Calpurnia," said Piso. "But he is a charming young man, and she has always had a sisterly fondness for him, which is sure to quicken into a warmer feeling in due time."

"I presume you desire her happiness?" asked Crassus, fixing his eyes on Piso.

"Do you ask me, Publius? Could I have done

more to ensure it than by promoting a marriage between her and a young man whose chief recommendation is his virtuous disposition ?"

"As for a virtuous disposition, Lucius, men are much alike within—we wear different masks, that is all. Aulus is young and handsome, and is liked by men and women in a way I confess I envy. *I* have never been able to become popular myself with my fellow-men—or women either. Perhaps it is that I conceal too little. But there are some evils in being such a universal favourite—some women might be jealous——"

"Do you mean to insinuate anything against Aulus ?" asked Piso.

"The Gods forbid!" cried Crassus, earnestly. "He is a friend of mine—that is, I am a friend of his —for I am sure all the love is, as usual, on *my* side. He is charming! But the question is—is so charming a son-in-law likely to make Calpurnia quite as good a husband as an ugly, battered, poor fellow like me, who has sown his wild oats, and, being an unlucky dog, would be grateful for a little kindness from a lovely girl like Calpurnia, instead of being, like these golden youths, satiated with love and admiration ? Then, as to position and fortune—as I said before, I am of your own stock. Atticus's father was, I think, only of equestrian rank, and of but moderate fortune?"

"I have carefully administered my ward's fortune, and it is now sufficient for a private person," said Piso, rather coldly. "But I choose him for his untainted youth, and because his father fell at my side. I loved him, and I think his son loves me and my house."

"Oh, I'm sure he does; he's devoted to you. He told me he would lay down his life for you. He knows your heart is set on this marriage."

"What do you mean, Publius?" said Piso, turning white with anger. "Do you wish to hint that he does not himself desire it?"

Crassus threw up his hands with the air of a man in a painful embarrassment. "I am in a cruel strait, Lucius," he said. "I shall probably appear to you to be traducing my rival. For Calpurnia's sake, I will condescend to call this young man my rival——"

"Speak out, Publius. Does he desire to break off the match?" asked Piso, angrily. "Has he a greater alliance in view?"

"Nay, nay; be not bitter—it is not like you, Lucius. Heavens! what shall I say? Why am I compelled to blacken him? Why not listen to my suit on the grounds I urged—my birth, fortune, character—as a man who has had his fling, and is weary of folly. We could do much, Lucius, if I were your son-in-law, instead of being supposed to be your enemy."

Sometimes the least penetrating vision has an instant's clairvoyance, and Piso seemed for a moment to see all Crassus's plan—the family fortunes and influence thus united would indeed be greatly strengthened. But his distrust of Crassus taught him, even at that moment, to foresee also that in such a partnership the less scrupulous must surely gain the upper hand.

"Explain yourself, Publius," he said. "I ask you for the third time whether you have any reason to suppose that Atticus desires to break off the marriage?"

"I have reason to suppose he would acquiesce in your doing so," replied Crassus. And, as if reluctant, but desperate, he pulled a sealed scroll from his bosom, and said, "I ought to have given you this at first; but I am so reluctant to appear as the accuser, and now you will force me to disclose all I know."

Piso, scarcely concealing his own doubts of Crassus, stretched out his hand for the scroll, and, sitting down on the couch from which he had risen, he cut the string with a knife, and, having first looked at the seal, opened and read—

"Aulus Atticus to L. Calpurnius Piso, health. Calpurnius Crassus, my dearest Father—if you permit me to call you by so blessed a name—will tell you that he has seen Caius and me, and that we are

well. If you are well, we rejoice. Crassus will inform you of the matter of which he spoke to me. I have received from you, my dearest guardian, the love and care of a father, and I owe you the duty of a son. I place my life at your disposal—dispose of it. For the rest, I expect your displeasure, with a grief which I cannot express. When I come, I can say much; but now I can write nothing. I shall await your commands at Athens, whether to return or to remain here. Give my most respectful affection to Cornelia and Aemilia, my brotherly greeting to Julius. I hope the little Tertia is well. Hear what Crassus tells you; but hear me before you pronounce judgment on me. From my inmost heart, I pray that you may be preserved. Farewell.—From Athens, on the second of the Nones of October."

"What does this mean?" asked Piso, when he had read the letter twice over.

"My dear Lucius, bear me witness that I did not wish to speak—— "

"What does it mean? What has the boy done? Has he fallen in love with an Athenian courtesan?"

"As the sons do in Terence's Comedies? No, my dear Lucius—or, if he has, he has had the good sense to keep it to himself."

"Then what does he mean? Why does he expect my displeasure?"

"Lucius, the reason is so frivolous, so ridiculous, you will not believe me—you will accuse me of a jest, and a very bad one too."

"Speak at once, Publius. What has Atticus done which will displease me so much?"

"Does he say 'so much'? Really, Lucius, I would, if I were you, refuse to take it seriously. Nothing damps enthusiastic folly like a little good-natured contempt."

"I wait, Publius, to hear the truth."

"Well," said Crassus, who had once seen Piso angry, and knew he had kept him in suspense about as long as was safe, "you know they went over to Ephesus last winter? Really, 'pon my honour, I don't know how to tell you—it's too ridiculous. Yet, really, I'm afraid to say it. Well, since you insist, you must know he fell in with the Christians in Ephesus——"

"*What?*" exclaimed Piso, starting up so suddenly that he overturned the round table between the couches, and the gold and silver dishes and goblets, the glass and crystal, and the salt-cellars with the images of the Lares, all fell clashing and crashing on the marble floor, and half a dozen slaves, who had been waiting in the kitchen-corridor to clear away, rushed in to see what had happened. "Leave us," said Piso. "It was an accident. We would not be disturbed."

"Just tell my fellows to be ready by the third hour of the night—or may I say the fourth, Lucius?" said Crassus, who was lolling on the cushions eating a peach.

Piso was quite as calm outwardly, but he could not imitate the easy indifference which was his cousin's natural manner.

"The later you start, the longer our conversation can be—and you will wish to see Aemilia again," said Piso.

"Very well, the fourth hour, then; and tell them to put another pillow in the litter, and let Agathocles bring me the casket I brought from Athens."

"Perhaps, Publius, we had better go to the South Tower," said Piso, when the slaves had departed. "We cannot be overheard there, and I must hear all you can tell me before I decide what to do—whether to treat the affair as the passing folly of a moment, and not even mention it to Aemilia, or whether to send for Aulus and Caius at once."

And as he said the words, he remembered that Demetrius had bid him *not* let the youths return, and he smote his hands together with a sharp angry force, as he summoned a slave and bid him carry a brazier of charcoal into the South Tower.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE TURRET.

Almost every Roman villa had its tower, where in mild weather the guests might sit at meat and gaze on all sides over the landscape. Piso's villa at Baiae had several of these towers, three storeys high, and the South Tower was especially appropriated to Piso himself. It was, in fact, a sanctum, in which it was understood that only Aemilia or Cornelia might venture to disturb him. The topmost of the three chambers it contained was fitted up as a small library, with books and writing materials. Upon a table stood the small but very exquisite casket of ivory and tortoiseshell which Crassus had ordered his servant to bring.

It was to this safe retirement that Piso led Crassus, the latter grumbling freely at being taken away from the well-warmed apartments of the villa to this chilly bird's-nest, exposed on all sides to air and wind, with

only the thin protection of the slabs of transparent stone which filled its four large windows.

Crassus shivered, in spite of the great charcoal brazier, and sent for his travelling-cloak, disregarding Piso's impatience to be alone with him. Perhaps Crassus did not regret the time thus gained to consider what cue it would be best to take in the approaching *tête-à-tête* with his impracticable kinsman.

"For charity, Lucius, draw some of your curtains. The north wind is blowing—I can feel it in my marrow."

Piso silently drew the thick curtains—striped orange and purple—across the north and east windows.

"You seem to forget, Lucius," said Crassus, fretfully, "that I am just come from the Isles of Greece. Eight years in Britain, I suppose, make a man as hardy as a Dacian. And now you have dragged me up to this masthead of a place, I have nothing to tell you."

For all reply, Piso took a coal from the brazier, with a little pair of brass tongs lying among his writing materials on the inlaid table, and lighted a lamp with four branches which hung from the deep panelled ceiling. Then he drew the other curtains close, and sitting down in an ebony chair with slender arms opposite the couch on which Crassus lay muffled

up in his cloak, he leaned back, and seemed to await whatever Crassus might have to reveal.

"I tell you I have no more to say," said Crassus, irritably. "What *can* there be, except the fact? The young men came over from Athens by my invitation to see me at my Teian villa. I had previously heard something at Ephesus which made me think I owed it to you to make some inquiries. Atticus is older than your Caius, and folly is a catching malady. I took an opportunity when we were alone one day, and asked Atticus point-blank—you know my maxim has always been, 'come to the point at once, and don't beat about the bush'—I asked him point-blank, 'What's this they say in Ephesus, that you and Caius Piso used to visit the old Jew who calls himself John the Ambassador, when you were there, and that you became a disciple of his?'"

"Pray continue, Publius," said Piso, as Crassus paused, his eyes always keenly watching him. "Tell me, I beg, every word that passed between you. How did Aulus receive your question?"

"As Brutus did the ghost of Caius Julius," replied Crassus. "He was violently agitated; evidently I had taken him completely by surprise. He turned pale, he trembled; I saw the sweat stand on his forehead. But he made a great effort to recover his self-possession, and presently said, stammering

and floundering a good deal, 'It is true, Crassus, and I am ready to justify myself; but I do not know how you can have discovered it.' 'Oh, oh, my dear fellow,' says I, 'you don't imagine two fashionable young gentlemen like Piso and yourself can be always going to see an old Jew priest, and assisting at his sacrifices —whatever they may be'—there, I promise you, I looked very hard at him, but he did not blench— 'without,' I said, 'attracting notice and arousing a little curiosity? I suppose,' I said, 'there's a girl in the case, for I don't imagine you are going to tell me you have turned Jew, or Christian, or whatever may be old John's religion.' I said that on purpose, you see, Lucius, to make him think it was all so low that no decent people knew anything about it. But, of course, *I* knew perfectly well that this John has made a considerable noise in Ephesus, and that a good many women of the better class—and even a few men—go to him. That fellow Paulus, you know, was once at Ephesus, who was put to death by Nero for the Great Fire. Indeed, Ephesus is a perfect hot-bed of Christians; one hears of nothing but the miracles of the Ephesian Diana and the preaching of these fellows. I've my own opinion about 'em, but that, I think, I'll keep to myself. That venerable old humbug, Apollonius, the Pythagorean, is there too, in great force just now; he affects, you know, to be a modern

Socrates, Solon, and Zeno, all rolled into one. I've my opinion about him, too, which I intend to acquaint"—here Crassus suddenly checked himself just in time, but in a moment added, in evident confusion—"*you* with, some day. Well," he continued hurriedly, as if to cover this inadvertent slip, "we had a little more conversation that day, and more the next. Atticus, when he had regained his composure, defended himself with some art. Most of us, he said, belonged to some School of Philosophy or other; why should not he belong to the Christian School? At this I could not help bursting out laughing—the idea of a Christian Philosophy is killing—I really know not when I have laughed so much, and whenever it occurs to me, it upsets my gravity again. I burst out suddenly in the middle of a serious conversation with an old gentleman on board. He thought, I believe, that the motion of the vessel had affected my brain. I had to tell him, and I thought he would have laughed himself into a fit. We shall have our horses setting up next as founders of a School."

"But, Atticus—did he say anything more? Did he explain what he means to do? I don't understand what it all means," said Piso, who, between indignation and perplexity at this inconceivable delusion of a superior young man, to whom he had been about to

confide his favourite child, and his deep-rooted distrust of Calpurnius Crassus, knew neither what to say, nor what to think. "Explain to me—what is a Christian?" he said. "I never heard them called Philosophers before. I thought they were only a sect of the Jews, still more ferocious and fanatic. It is *impossible* that Aulus Atticus can have joined them! I would as soon believe he had become a priest of Cybele. And I suppose the Christian superstition is only a variety of that form of fanaticism? Tell me, as precisely as you can, what Atticus himself says he has done, or has become. There *must* be some mistake."

"Do you think, Lucius, that on so serious a matter —involving, of course, Atticus's whole future prospects —I did not use every endeavour to get to the bottom of it? If I am mistaken in anything, it is because Atticus has thrown dust in my eyes—not impossible, of course; but then, what on earth could be his motive?"

Piso did not reply. It was the motive of Crassus which he desired to discover.

"As for what they are, or what they believe," said Crassus, with the air of a man who is getting slightly bored, but yet wishes to give all the information in his power, "I could get only vague assertions out of Atticus. He says they believe, like the Jews, in one

God—Anchialus, I imagine. He also says they slay no victims whatever, and that their doctrines, instead of—like the Jews' religion—inculcating hatred of the whole human race, are very benevolent. But he admitted that, according to the Christians, every action of a Roman citizen's life is offensive to their God; and when I asked him what he meant to do in this case, he replied that he would probably be unable to occupy any public office. A nice prospect, Lucius, for your son-in-law!"

"I have held no public office myself, Publius, and yet I am not a Christian," said Piso, all the bitterness of his own enforced obscurity stirred by this remark of his cousin's.

"Ah, but you are still young enough to hope for office. Who knows what may happen, Lucius, if you give me Calpurnia? I have some small influence at Court, and know those who have more—— What is the matter?"

"Nothing," said Piso, hoarsely. He had risen, and gone to the window behind him, and was looking out into the gathering gloom. But he grasped the curtain so roughly that he tore the rod which supported it from its socket, and it fell clattering to the floor. With one twist of his hand he could have silenced Crassus's lying throat for ever, and the temptation was for the instant so strong that Piso

trembled for fear of yielding to it. Crassus was spared the knowledge of this dangerous temper of Piso's, however, by his utter disbelief in human virtue. Only an idiot would be such a fool as to revenge himself to his own hurt. To throttle your cousin, who had come to pay you a friendly visit, in the tower of your villa would certainly not advance your interests—except, perhaps, in some very peculiar juncture of circumstances. As things stood, it was far more to the interest of Crassus to get Piso out of the way; indeed, it would have been greatly to the interest of Crassus, had Piso thrown himself out of the window he had just opened—letting in a blast of autumnal air, very disagreeable to Crassus.

"When you have cooled yourself, Lucius, perhaps you will remember that even in Campania an autumn night strikes chill," he said. "And now what answer do you give me? You will surely pause before you make Atticus your son-in-law?"

"I can determine on nothing till I see him," said Piso.

Crassus watched him narrowly, as he affected to shade his eyes from the lamp. Why was he not more moved, more indignant with Atticus? Crassus had a profound contempt for Piso's soldierly simplicity and aversion for intrigue; he took it for stupidity, and was accordingly surprised and disgusted as the

growing conviction forced itself on his mind, that Piso suspected *him* of some secret design in this sudden proposal for Calpurnia's hand. He was sure Piso did not fathom his design; but it was sufficiently disconcerting to find that his cousin, for all his simplicity, was actually aware that men sometimes masked one design by another.

"And Caius?" said Piso, with grim quietness, as he closed the window and sat down again. "Is he a Christian too?"

"I asked Atticus that, but he assured me that Caius had not undergone the initiatory ceremony, and had no present intention of——"

"Immortal Gods! do you mean that Aulus has actually undergone it?" exclaimed Piso.

Crassus, if not quite a coward, required a strong motive to face violent scenes, and he hastened to pacify Piso. "I don't know what the ceremony is exactly," he said soothingly; "it is not circumcision. It is, I believe, merely a symbolical washing, like those in the Mysteries. And now, once more, Lucius, may I hope for the happiness of being your son-in-law?"

"I can say nothing now, Lucius. I am pledged to Atticus."

"He releases you," said Crassus. "I suppose you remember that if he persists in his obstinacy, the marriage could not take place by confarreatio——"

"No one is married by confarreatio now," said Piso. "I myself was not."

"There are sacrifices, however. It would be very awkward for you," replied Crassus. "Has this youth bewitched you, that you are ready to break through walls to have him for a son-in-law?"

"You mistake me," returned Piso, haughtily. "If I am convinced of his unworthiness, I shall reject him."

"You take a load off my mind, dear Lucius!" cried Crassus. "Let me at least not see my sweet young cousin thrown away! Your hand, Lucius."

We are, however vile, so constituted that our moral instincts, like the tail of a scotched snake, continue to give spasmodic twitches long after they have lost sensation. Crassus had one of these unpleasant twitches as he laid his long, supple hand in Piso's strong grasp.

"Let us descend to the ladies," he said. "They will wonder what has become of us. There is yet an hour before I must depart."

The ladies were in the room which the family used in winter evenings. Every one but Crassus found the hour very irksome. He devoted himself to Calpurnia, beginning the conversation by saying, as he pulled a roll from his bosom—

"Here is the surprise I spoke of at supper, my dearest little cousin."

Calpurnia blushed a great deal more than the occasion demanded, for the letter was from her brother Caius. Her eyes asked permission to open it, but Piso said—

"Keep it, my daughter, till our cousin has left us. Perhaps he would like a game of draughts——"

"Nay, let us converse; the time is short," said Crassus.

"Are you obliged to leave us to-night, Publius?" said Aemilia, looking up from her embroidery, and trying to throw some cordiality into her voice.

"Thanks. I fear so, dear Aemilia," he replied so sweetly that Cornelia muttered, "Oh, the hypocrite!"

"I fear I must go," resumed Crassus, as though he felt quite sure that everybody there wished he could stay. "I have business which ought not to wait, and, on the whole, I believe travelling is less fatiguing by night than by day. I shall do seven miles an hour all night, and nine after I pass Fondi, and get on the Appian Road. I shall dine at Auxur, go on to Aricia, and sleep at my villa there to-morrow night, and be in Rome as early as I need next morning. Have you any messages, Lucius? You, Rusticus, will, I suppose, soon be returning yourself to that

"'Fumum et opes strepitumque Romae,'

which Horace advises us to cease to admire?"

"I return in a few days, Crassus," replied Rusticus, stiffly; "but first I go to visit my brother at Formiae."

"Is the immaculate Nerva still as intimate as ever with Veiento?" asked Crassus, pausing in the act of unlocking with a minute silver key the inlaid casket which he held in his hands.

"I saw him there at supper not long ago," returned Rusticus.

"I must have you to meet him; I will give a supper-party on purpose," said Crassus, who was perfectly aware that Rusticus and Veiento were not upon speaking terms. "We will have Martial, too; he and Veiento egg each other on—each sharpens the other's wit. What do you think of that cameo, Lucius? I bought it of Aristarchus, the goldsmith on the Cerameicus—the man, by the way, where your Caius lodges. It bears the name of Dioscurides, as you see, and Aristarchus swore to me it was genuine. The stone is an Indian sardonyx, and, by good luck, not pierced, as most of them are." Crassus laid the jewel in the full light of the lamp on the table. It was a very fine stone, both layers being of a beautiful colour and without flaw. The shape was a somewhat narrow oval, and upon it, in admirable proportion to the dimensions of the oval, was a most exquisite figure of Artemis, with her bow, the crescent on her

brow, and, beside her, her hunting dog. She had just shot her arrow, her right arm was raised above her shoulder, her left hand grasped the bow, which seemed still to quiver with the recoil. The lines of the figure, and of the garment flowing out behind, were in the very purest style of the best Greek art, and exclamations of admiration burst from every one except Cornelia; when Crassus, putting it into her hand, begged her to examine the workmanship more closely, even she could not refrain from saying, as she returned it to him, "It is certainly extremely beautiful, Publius."

"What do you think of the setting?" asked Crassus of Aemilia. "It is rather severe; but then that is in character. Simplicity befits the Goddess of Chastity."

"It is sufficiently handsome to set off the stone," said Aemilia, "and yet it does not divert attention too much to itself."

"Exactly what I thought!" cried Crassus, delightedly. "I am charmed to find so admirable a judge approves my poor taste."

He was turning the gem about in his hands as he spoke. The setting was a simple band of gold, in width about one-sixth part of the short diameter; its plainness was relieved by a number of gold knobs, raised rather less than the radius of their circle, and

set at about two of their own diameters apart. Through a ring in the setting passed a second larger ring, and through this a chain made of a great number of gold threads closely interwoven in a plait which we still know as "the Grecian," and fastened with a finely chased golden clasp.

"You will permit me, Lucius, in memory of this pleasant meeting," said Crassus, after a pause, and speaking with, as it seemed, some slight embarrassment—"you will, I hope, permit me to beg my cousin Calpurnia's acceptance of this trifle. Caius was with me when I bought it, and when I told him I should take it for Calpurnia, he said he believed I should exactly hit her taste."

"You are very kind, Publius," said Piso; "but this is almost too handsome a present. Keep it, and let it be a marriage gift."

"Nay; it cost me less than you might suppose—and the best is only good enough for my cousin Calpurnia," replied Crassus, who believed that Calpurnia had changed colour at the word marriage. "It is, I really believe, the first present I have ever made you. What can one find to give you rich men? But this comes from Athens; let that make it of some value in Calpurnia's eyes."

Aemilia tried to utter a feeble protest; but Crassus only put the jewel into the casket, pushed it across

the table, and begged Calpurnia to let him see it on her neck.

Beautiful as was the gift, it was with reluctance that Calpurnia obeyed. When one is the daughter of a great noble, it is no doubt easier to despise gewgaws; but yet, I think, had Calpurnia been the daughter of the poorest Roman gentleman, she would have thought that this abhorred giver spoiled the gift. But she obeyed a sign from her mother, and took off the amulet she always wore—a large emerald which her grandmother had given her, engraved with interlacing lines forming triangles—clasped the Greek chain round her neck, and arranged the gem so that it might lie on the embroidered front of her tunic.

Calpurnia was a beautiful girl, and Piso saw with keen anxiety that her beauty had never appeared more sweet and womanly than to-night. If desire of her beauty should come to help ambition, he thought, then indeed would Crassus become a dangerous suitor!

Calpurnia was already nearly as tall as her mother. She had large limpid dark eyes, with long dark lashes; but her hair was golden—of that gold which the Roman ladies tried to produce artificially with washes of loosestrife-water. Her complexion was fair, but not florid—it had the delicate paleness of

some rare tropical flower, whose transparent petals are crowned with golden stamens; and there was an almost imperceptible droop in her slender, girlish figure—as yet not filled out in proportion to her height—which suggested a flower hanging its head a little after a thirsty summer day. Everything about her spoke of unsullied maidenhood—of a virgin soul in a virgin body. Piso saw his wife's eyes fixed on her daughter, and knew that she, like him, was trembling for the fate of this lovely and innocent young creature, around whose little Isle of Calm the tempests of the great world were seething and roaring. Soon—very soon—they would invade that Isle of Calm, and how would it be with this frail lily when the winds should lay the strong trees low?

CHAPTER XII.

A MESSENGER TO ATHENS.

At last, with a great hurrying and bustling of slaves, with much calling and shouting, and cracking of whips, and pawing of horses—incited thereto by their drivers—for would you have the horses of a Senator, and a friend of Caesar, stand like stocks, or hired hacks, till they were lashed into a start? At last, then, Calpurnius Crassus was on his way to Rome, and Piso was free to take counsel with himself and those he trusted as to the probable meaning of his cousin's visit. At the very instant of starting, Crassus had put his head out from the curtains of his travelling carriage, and had called to Piso, loud enough for all the servants standing by to hear—

"May I greet no one in Rome for you, Lucius?"

"A thousand thanks, Publius; Rusticus will carry all my greetings," replied Piso.

"I shall be there long before he is," said Lucius, "and shall be sure to see some of your friends."

"Then greet Nerva and Vipstanus Messala," said Piso. "All the rest can wait till Rusticus goes."

"I will be sure to do it; and Messala's brother Regulus, too, of course. Farewell, Lucius! farewell, till we meet again!"

And so he departed, shooting one last poisoned arrow as he went.

The letter which Crassus had given to Calpurnia from her brother Caius was exceedingly short.

"C. Calpurnius Piso Frugi to his Calpurnia, health. If you are well, my dearest sister, I rejoice. I also am well. My brother Aulus is well, and greets you. Farewell, my most sweet sister, until our happy return.—From Athens."

Piso gave this letter back to his daughter, kissed her, and bade her go to bed. Then, leaving Quintus deep in a volume of Licinius Macer's *Orations*, Piso ordered a brazier to be carried into the large library, and there presently Cornelia, Aemilia, and Rusticus joined him.

"What has happened, Lucius?" asked Cornelia, eagerly. "What has he been doing in Asia? Whatever he has told you, distrust him!"

"I do, my dear mother," replied Piso; and then he told them briefly what Crassus had told him concerning Atticus, and the proposal he had made for Calpurnia's hand.

Now, Cornelia had hitherto not entirely approved

of Atticus as a husband for her granddaughter. Piso might, she had thought, have looked higher, and have chosen a son-in-law from a family equal to his own. But, so great is the modifying power of comparison on our estimate of things, the instant she heard that Crassus had offered himself as a suitor, she would, had it been possible, have married Calpurnia to Atticus that very night. As for the accusation which Crassus had brought against him, Cornelia made short work of that. Probably, she declared, it was entirely unfounded; Calpurnius was quite capable of inventing it. "He might as well tell us that Aulus has sold himself to an Athenian slave-dealer! It would be quite as credible."

"Then what does his letter mean? Why does Aulus expect me to be angry?" asked Piso.

"How can I tell?" said Cornelia, whose temper was roused. "How do I know what knavery has been at work? Never speculate, my son, on what a liar says. Do you think that either Aulus or our Caius wrote what they really meant in those letters? Do you think that—youths as they are—they know so little of Publius as to write anything which they did not wish him to see, in a letter which he was to carry? Or perhaps you think that the friend of Regulus and Veiento, and the sharer of Domitian's debaucheries, would not open a letter?"

"Truly, mother, I believe he would do anything whereby he thought he had anything to gain," answered Piso. "But I examined the seals carefully."

"Pooh!" said the old lady, scornfully. "Are there no hot knives? no clever slaves? How can you be so easily hoodwinked, Lucius? Do you not observe how Caius takes care to call Aulus his 'brother'? And how pointedly he says that 'he also is well'?"

"My dear mother, these words form a part of every letter we write," said Piso.

"Take them away from *this* letter, and there is nothing left," said Cornelia. "What is more evident than that Publius offered to carry letters, and that our youths wrote what was intended to give us a hint to suspend our judgment for a while? I agree with you so far as to admit it looks as if Atticus *was* aware that Publius would traduce him to you. But is this a reason for listening to his insinuations?"

"I never believed them—that is, I was always fully aware he might be deceiving me."

"*Might* be, Lucius!" cried Cornelia. "Do you not see his plan? To draw you in with himself, and then to betray you? You will be the tongs with which he will pull the chestnuts out of the fire. You are too simple, Lucius, and I fear your inability to see how bad men are will prove your and our ruin

yet. The best I can hope is, that this simplicity of yours may make your enemies think you a fool, not worth destroying! And now, for the last time, I tell you that you will not be able to save yourself, as Agricola did, by submitting to be deprived of the dignities you are justly entitled to. You must crush the tyrant, or he will crush you. For you there is only ruin, or—action. But I know that I speak in vain."

So saying, Cornelia left the room, her step as firm and stately as usual. The others did not speak for several minutes. Then Rusticus said gravely—

"Although, Piso, I do not agree with Cornelia as to the advice she gives, yet I confess that this visit, and still more this proposal of Publius Crassus, makes me extremely uneasy."

"It is strange," observed Piso, thoughtfully. "He said that Agricola would not have been allowed to live much longer."

"Did he say that, Lucius?" said Aemilia, turning deadly pale.

"What could he know about it? He was in Asia, or the Grecian Isles at the time," said Rusticus, but his words sounded hollow in his own ears. "My advice to you, Lucius," he continued, after a moment's pause, "is, to write at once to Atticus by a trusty messenger, and despatch that messenger at the earliest hour possible."

"Send Eudoxus," said Aemilia, eagerly. "He is a Greek, and will have less difficulty in making himself understood. You can trust him."

"Yes," interrupted Rusticus; "Aemilia is right. If you have a servant whom you can trust, do not commit too much to paper. It is true, as Cornelia said, that a hot knife can betray all one's secrets."

"I will write it to-morrow. No, I will write to-night, and Eudoxus shall set off to-morrow. He shall sail in the *Centaur*. There is just time," said Piso, and, going to his writing cabinet, he took out a bundle of paper, and began to select a sheet.

"I will wish you a favourable hour, and a sound sleep when your business is accomplished," said Rusticus. "You do well to send Eudoxus to-morrow. Farewell till morning."

When Arulenus was gone, Aemilia came and put her arms round her husband's neck. "My heart is heavy, Lucius," she said. "I fear I know not what. I would that Publius had not come. He is a bird of ill omen."

"Nay, my Aemilia," said Piso, sitting down and drawing her upon his knee, "there is less need now for fear than formerly. Domitian is absent in the northern forests. We are safe at least till he returns."

"When I saw Publius, it seemed to me I saw your Evil Genius, Lucius," said Aemilia, clinging to him.

"He has a dreadful likeness to you—an ugly, wicked likeness, and his smile is so cruel—and when I saw him look at Calpurnia, I could have shrieked out, and run in between him and her."

"He shall never have her, my little Aemilia," said Piso, clasping his wife close. "Rather than that, I will give her to Atticus, even if he be a Christian. I do not think, Aemilia, that Publius knows quite as much as he would have us think, for he said but little of Flavius Clemens, only that he is still in favour with Domitian, although he seldom attends the banquets—which *we* knew months ago—and that his sons are certainly named Domitian's heirs, and have received the names of Vespasian and Domitian. But he did not drop a word—not though he said Flavius was unsociable—about this report concerning Flavius himself."

"He must have heard it," said Aemilia.

"Aemilia," said Piso, "does our mother know more than she tells me? Has she any secret sources of information? And, in particular, do you think she receives any from Demetrius the Cynic?"

"I think it likely," replied Aemilia. "But she never tells me; she knows I should tell you."

"You have been a faithful wife to me, Aemilia," he said, looking tenderly at her.

"Oh, my Lucius, I have been so happy as your

wife," she said, with tears. "I know how you have fretted in these last eight years; but oh, to me they have been so sweet, that I only pray the Gods to grant me eight more such blessed years! In Aquitaine, all was new, and glad, and bright—that, perhaps, was our happiest time. In Britain, I was sometimes happy —who would not be who was near Agricola and Decediana?—but there were so many wars. I was so often torn with alarms, that our peaceful life here has seemed to me unspeakably blest. I am not a heroine, like Arria, and Fannia, and your own mother. If I have you, I am happy; I ask no more than to see my husband and my sons and daughters safe and happy around me. I live but in them. Perhaps I have too little ambition for your wife, Lucius; yet, if it had pleased the Gods that you should fill some great office, I should have been proud. Never think, my Lucius, that I should not have been proud of your greatness. But as it is, I comfort my heart by saying, 'If my Lucius were Proconsul of Asia, he would be too busy to talk much with his poor Aemilia. He would be exposed to dangers, to wars and rebellions' —whereas now, surely so harmless and innocent a life as ours cannot draw down Caesar's wrath."

Piso did not answer; he only pressed his wife closer to his breast. He knew, better than she did, the extent of the danger. He knew that ever since the

revolt of Antonius Saturninus in Germany, two years ago, Domitian had grown suspicious of all men, but especially of those who had any claim to military glory. Piso knew also that these suspicions made Domitian increasingly anxious to keep his treasury full. Aemilia herself knew all this—as who could help knowing?—but every one who spoke before her instinctively leaned rather to hope than fear; and until the visit of Crassus had given tangible shape to Cornelia's Cassandra-warnings, Aemilia had buoyed herself up so successfully that she had not been unhappy at Baiae. Cornelia's cry of "Wolf! wolf!" had caused her many passing panics, but no wolf had appeared. Now, however, the wolf had come, and had cast his cruel and hungry eyes on the fairest lamb of the flock; Aemilia's heart was disquieted within her, and all Cornelia's prophecies seemed suddenly arrayed in threatening phalanx against her.

As Piso wrote—laboriously tracing the words with the reed, for he would not confide this matter to the less trustworthy waxen tablets—Aemilia sat in a chair near him, now watching the lines growing under his hand, the clear, firm characters standing up straight and regular on the page; now with unutterable love and disquiet, looking at his face, which seemed to her to wear a new expression of sorrowful gravity, yet with something of exalted fortitude, as of

a man who has made up his mind to the worst; and a great wave of anguish swept over her, as something seemed to whisper, "So he will look, just before he goes to die."

"What is it, my Aemilia?" asked Piso, turning quickly to where she sat, with that look quite gone from his face, and only his loving care of her expressed in his eyes. "What is it? Are you in pain?"

"I did not speak, Lucius," she said, the colour rushing to her cheek, and all her terrors scattered by his voice.

"I thought you groaned—and you are very pale," he said. "You must go to bed and rest. But, first, just listen to what I have written, and I will go to Eudoxus' chamber, and give him his orders, that he may depart in the morning. The *Centaur* is to sail at noon. I intend, Aemilia, to tell Eudoxus little or nothing; but I have desired Caius, as you will see, to put entire confidence in him. Listen! I address the letter to both.

"'Our kinsman, my dearest sons, has visited us, on his way to Rome, and has brought two letters —one from Aulus to myself; the other from Caius to his sister Calpurnia. We are glad to learn that you are well. We also are well, and nothing has occurred of any moment. Our thoughts are fixed upon the

vintage, which this year is very abundant, and the grapes of excellent quality. We have set aside the best of the Falernian, to be drunk when your eldest son, my Caius, shall put on the toga. Your mother, your grandmother, and your brother Julius, with the little Tertia and your sister Calpurnia, greet you both. Eudoxus, who carries this, will, I hope, bring us sure news of you. If he cannot, as I fear, return to us before the navigation of the Great Sea is closed for the winter, keep him. You know his fidelity. I have already so far emancipated him as to place his name in the census, and I have promised him the full rights of a citizen. I pray the Gods to preserve you both. Farewell.'

"My cousin Calpurnius is welcome to read this letter," said Piso, as he prepared to seal it with the signet-ring which he wore on the ring-finger of his left hand—the only ring he wore. He next unlocked the padlock of a heavy iron chest, and took out a bag of money. This done, and bidding Aemilia go to rest, he took a hand-lamp, and passed through the atrium, and through many other halls and corridors, to where, in the lowest story of the north tower, were the rooms of Eudoxus the tabularius, an Asiatic Greek by birth, who, in addition to his duties as accountant, was also Piso's amanuensis.

It was now past the fifth hour of the night, as Piso

knew by the horologe in the library—a magnificent clepsydra, one of the wonders of the Villa, so contrived that the dropping of the water moved a wheel, which in its turn caused a beautiful little figure of Time to rise in such a manner that the scythe it held in its hand pointed to the hours marked on a silver pillar. All was still as Piso crossed the atrium. The cedar-wood doors leading to the outer hall were closed. The fire on the altar of the Lares was burning clear, and so was the lamp which hung from the ceiling. It shed a pale, thin, moonbeam-like glimmer over the magnificent proportions of the atrium, the statues, and pictures. But Piso passed on quickly, and went through other halls and corridors, until, at the end of a long, broad passage, whose walls were pierced at intervals with long slits —through which the night-air found its way—he came to the door of the tower.

It was fastened; but the instant Piso tried it, a dog within set up a sharp, furious bark, and in another moment a man's voice called out, in the sleepy tones of one but half aroused—

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Eudoxus," answered Piso; "I—Piso. I would speak with you."

The dog ceased barking. There was a sound of bolts and bars being withdrawn, the door was opened,

and Eudoxus appeared—a powerful-looking man of thirty-five, his tunic all disarranged in the haste of putting it on, his glossy black hair rough and disordered, and his face flushed with sleep. His shaggy cur fawned upon Piso.

"Is Tryphosa here?" asked Piso, when he had entered the room, which was fitted up with shelves and cupboards, and looked like a kind of office. There was a door opposite to that by which Piso had come in, and he looked towards it as he spoke.

"No; she is sleeping with your little Tertia to-night, who was restless, and would not let her leave her," replied Eudoxus. "Is anything amiss, sir?"

"Yes—much," answered Piso, taking the chair which Eudoxus had placed for him. "Are you well awake, Eudoxus? For you must listen carefully to all I say, and carry it in your memory."

"I am awake, sir," replied Eudoxus, who was evidently much alarmed at this midnight visit.

"You must sail to-morrow for Athens, Eudoxus, in the *Centaur*—she is to sail at noon. Here is money, and here is a bill of exchange on Dionysius the banker in the Agora. And here is a letter, which, as you see, is addressed to both my son and my ward."

"I understand you, sir," said Eudoxus, as Piso paused. His countenance—it was a very honest and

open one—had cleared considerably. "The *Centaur* may be the last ship before winter," he observed.

"She may be," said Piso, "and that is why I am so anxious you should sail in her. And now, attend to me. I am sending you to my son and to Aulus Atticus, that you may return to me as soon as possible, and bring me a full account of their health, and of all that concerns them—mark me, Eudoxus, *of all that concerns them*. You are to tell them that Calpurnius Crassus visited me to-day, that he told me certain things concerning them, and that he asked for the hand of my daughter Calpurnia."

"The Gods forfend! The Immortal Gods forfend!" cried Eudoxus, in dismay.

"Hush, Eudoxus!" said Piso.

"Oh, there is not a living creature in the tower, except my little Fortunata—who is asleep—and the dog Croesus," said Eudoxus. "But, my dear master, you will not give her to Crassus? There is not a man, woman, or child in all Rome who does not hate him. He has the cruel Claudian blood in his veins; he has the Claudian pride and arrogance; he loves no one; he would betray——"

"Do you think *I* do not know him, Eudoxus?" said Piso, quietly. "You are to tell Caius and Aulus this. You are to add that I have put him off for a time, and have told him that I shall not force Cal-

purnia to marry *any one* against her will. You must say"—here Piso sank his voice—"that I regard Crassus as my enemy, and this proposal as covering some evil design. It is because I will not trust these words of mine to paper that I send you."

"I understand you," repeated Eudoxus.

"Look, Eudoxus, at the seals of the letter," said Piso, "and tell me with what signet it is sealed."

"With your emerald signet, Piso, bearing the head of the Great Africanus, your illustrious ancestor—the one you always use—it is on your hand now," replied Eudoxus, when he had brought the seals near the light and examined them.

"And what is this?" said Piso, taking a ring from the purse on his neck.

"It is your sardonyx, sir," replied Eudoxus, examining it. "It bears the figure of Harpocrates. It is attributed, as you know, to Dioscurides; but I incline to think——"

"Enough, enough, my dear Eudoxus!" cried Piso. "You are, we know very well, an authority on gems and works of art—would you be a Greek, if you were not? But it is not to discuss the merits of the stone that I show it you. Look at it well—should you know the impression?"

"Of a surety, I should know it anywhere," returned Eudoxus, giving Piso the ring. "In the matter of

engraved gems, I am not easily deceived, though I say it."

"Very well, then," said Piso. "Listen with all your ears. You may be detained in Athens by various causes. Of course, in case of absolute necessity, you could come round by Dalmatia and Illyria, overland; but that is a great and toilsome journey. And my son may desire to keep you with him. Should I have occasion to write to you, I should equally be obliged to send the messenger by Illyria. Examine carefully the seals of my letters. If I seal them with my own signet of the head of Africanus, interpret my words literally—do exactly what I tell you. Do you understand?"

"I do," said Eudoxus, his strong keen eyes fixed steadfastly on his master's face.

"But if," continued Piso, "I should at any time seal a letter with that sardonyx, bearing the figure of Harpocrates, interpret my words in the contrary sense. That is, if I say, 'Come back as soon as may be convenient," stay away as long as you can, or till you hear again. If I say, 'Do not go yet to Ephesus,' start for Ephesus as soon as winds and waves permit you. Do you understand me now?"

"Fully, sir," said Eudoxus. "But what, I pray you, am I to say to your son and to Aulus Atticus, when they shall ask me when they are to come

home? You told me a little while ago that they were to visit the cities of Asia."

"You ask me, Eudoxus, more than I can answer to myself," replied Piso. "I am greatly perplexed. There may be danger in their coming; there may also be danger in their remaining absent. What think you, Eudoxus, of Demetrius the Cynic?" Piso asked this question abruptly, and as if it had nothing to do with what had gone before.

"Who is now at Puteoli?" asked Eudoxus. "He is, I think, a bold and clever man, and knows most things before other people do. He knew of Agricola's death the very day it happened."

"If you love me, Eudoxus, let us have no magical knowledge!" said Piso. "I trust you are too sensible a man to believe such trash."

"I only tell you facts," said Eudoxus, respectfully. "He met me on the road to Puteoli, on the 10th of the Calends of September, and he said, 'Eudoxus, tell your master Piso, that the great Agricola is with the Gods.' You know that I came home and told you."

"A lucky guess," said Piso. "He doubtless has spies who bring him speedy word, and he knew Agricola was dying, and when he saw you could not resist the temptation to play the Oracle. If he had been wrong, he would have sworn you misunderstood him."

"Yet, when one remembers all the omens and prodigies of which history is full," observed Eudoxus, humbly, "what can one say? Did not Caius Cornelius the Augur declare to those around him—he being at Padua—that Caesar had conquered, on the day the battle of Pharsalia was fought, telling them at the same time the very instant that the fight began?"

"You Greeks are all alike superstitious," said Piso, rising. "It is the sixth hour of the night. I will see you in the morning; but I wish you to go without observation, yet not secretly, either. If any one asks you, say you go a journey, but say not whither, not even to Tryphosa. And now, good night."

"Shall I not light you, sir?" asked Eudoxus.

"No; my lamp suffices," replied Piso. "Sleep, and dream good dreams, and forget Demetrius and his oracles. Good night."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PORTENT.

As Piso retraced his steps through the dark and empty halls, his thoughts were chiefly occupied with Demetrius. Demetrius's warning, coming as it did, almost at the very moment of a tangible danger showing itself, impressed Piso in spite of himself. As yet, it was easy to communicate with Caius, and bid him not return; but the events of a few days might make such a communication dangerous to the sender —perhaps impossible. Piso turned to go back to tell Eudoxus to forbid Caius to leave Athens, and then he reflected that it was late, that Eudoxus would be gone to bed again. He could tell him in the morning.

"I chose the lesser risk," thought Piso. "Athens is safer than Rome."

Thinking this, and his mind much relieved by the sudden resolution he had come to, and marvelling that he had not seen at once that this was the wiser course, Piso had almost reached the atrium, when

he heard a slight noise. He thought it was some one in the atrium—perhaps Aemilia, coming to see why he was so long with Eudoxus—and he quickened his pace, holding the lamp above his head, that it might throw a better light. But there was no one. The cedar doors were closed as before, the lamp burning—but even as he saw this, the folding doors flew open, with a shriek as of a creaking hinge, and before Piso could spring forward, there came a hollow clangour echoing awfully in the silence of the night, and a keen blast swept through the atrium, extinguishing not only the lamps, but the sacred fire of the Lares. Before the sound could die away, Piso was in the outer hall, where Cerberus the great watch-dog was setting up a dismal howl, and Midas the janitor, half dead with fright, was on his knees at the door of his cell, calling on his Gods in his own Phrygian tongue. All was in darkness; but Piso knew that the great outer gates had burst open. They were of bronze, fastened by locks, bolts, and bars, and so massive that it took four slaves to open and shut them. Piso was a brave man, but he would not have been a Roman, if he had not felt a thrill of superstitious horror; yet he would not yield to it. It was, he told himself, either a sudden gust of wind—the doors not having been properly fastened—or it was a trick to frighten him into conspiracy. He seized the trembling

slave by the shoulder. "Get up!" he said angrily. "Stand up, this instant, you cowardly beast, or I'll send you to the dungeons to-morrow. Stand up—and now go and get a light, and be quick, or it shall be the worse for you!"

Midas, his knees knocking together, was stumbling off to obey this command, when Piso recalled him.

"Stop!" he said. "If you tell a living creature what has happened, I'll have you flogged, and put you in chains! Remember, and obey!"

While Midas was gone, Piso felt the doors carefully, to ascertain if possible whether there had been foul play. As he did so, the dog—a huge Molossian hound—whined piteously; he seemed to be lying in the doorway of the janitor's cell, afraid to come out, even to be nearer to his master.

Piso knelt down, and felt the bolts, which were of iron, fitting into sockets in the marble floor. He believed that the slaves had neglected to fasten these, and that a sudden gust had blown the doors open. It was true, the night seemed still, but sudden gusts sometimes arise even on still nights. Anything was better than to believe that the doors had opened of their own accord. But, as Piso passed his hand along the bottom of the door, he found with astonishment that the bolt was broken off. He tried the other bolt—that, too, was broken short.

He stepped across the threshold, and as he did, it seemed to him he heard a sigh. But nothing was to be seen, except the columns of the portico, a blacker blackness against the dark of the more distant trees. He remembered to have heard that shortly before the conspiracy of Caius Piso was discovered, in Nero's time, these doors had burst open of their own accord, in the dead of night, with the same far-sounding clang, and the remembrance stirred him rather to anger than to fear—anger at himself for so much as remembering an idle tale. Had not Lucretius proved to demonstration that—

> "We, as boys at night, by day do fear
> Shadows"?

With this anger of a sensible and strong-minded man at his own weakness, there mingled, however, a loftier indignation—the kindling of a brave man's courage, when at last he sees his foe. *If* old tales were true after all, and this was one of the prodigies which as our fathers believed warned great houses of approaching doom, then he would go forth to meet his fate like a man. It would have broken Aemilia's heart if she could have known with what a throb of secret joy Piso, gazing through the open doorway into the dark night, braced himself to meet whatever fate might be approaching.

When Midas returned with the light, Piso examined

the floor. There, sure enough, were the broken ends of the bolts lying in their sockets. The holdfast of the great bar had also given way, and the bar was twisted.

"This is the abominable carelessness of you and your fellows," said Piso. "You did not shoot the bolts properly when you closed the doors; a gust of wind shook them, they started a little, and their own weight did all this mischief. I have a great mind to have you whipped."

"By the Great Mother," said the janitor, in his abominable jargon of Phrygian mixed with broken Greek, "I swear to you, Master, that it is not my fault! I, and Pyramus the keeper of the atrium, and Ascanius the house-cleaner, and Gyges the sweeper, shut the doors after the noble Calpurnius Crassus had departed. Polemo, the fire-boy, was just come to feed the fire of the Lares, and he helped too. Ask them, I pray you, whether we did not shut the doors properly, and shoot home the bolts, and hang the bar—— Oh, ye Gods! the bar is broken! yet I fastened it, and locked the padlock—here is the key —and look, Master, the padlock holds, but the chain is broken."

"The weight of the doors could do it all," said Piso, "provided only you did not push the doors well home, and a strong gust of wind—— "

"May all the Gods torment me, Master, if the night is not as still as when the Halcyon is breeding!" said the luckless janitor, wringing his hands in despair.

"Still or not, if it happens again, you shall be whipped, sirrah!" said Piso. "And now help me to push the doors into their place."

The Phrygian was an enormous fellow, with wild red hair hanging down to his brawny shoulders. He and Piso both put their backs to the door, and pushed with all their might, but it needed all their strength.

"May I be crucified, Master, if it is not all we four —I, and Pyramus, and Gyges, and Ascanius—can do to shut these doors," said the perspiring janitor, as he flung his ponderous shoulders against them. "And to open them is harder still. It takes six of us, every day of our lives, to open these doors—some of the bathmen always help us."

By the time the doors were pushed to, Piso was convinced that this was the truth, and that Midas, at any rate, was innocent of any complicity. By a great exertion of his own unusual physical strength, Piso wrenched the bar so as to force it back into its place —this, and the immense weight of the doors themselves, would, he thought, make all safe till morning —nor, indeed, did he apprehend any attack. If

treachery were at work, he suspected his enemy of a more subtle plan than open violence.

"Sleep with one eye open till dawn," he said, more mildly, as he went back into the atrium, "and at daybreak, fetch the smith, and let him make new bolts and a new bar. And do not chatter about it."

Piso gave this last command with less than his usual decision—he felt that it was useless to talk of the wind, and equally useless to hope to conceal what had happened. Every one must see the smith fitting the new bolts to the door, even if Midas could be frightened into holding his tongue. It would be all over Baiae, Cumae, and Puteoli by noon. Silius would be coming over to learn the truth of the report —and for the first time, Piso recalled the ominous answers of the Vergilian Lots. The grim smile with which he had been thinking of how the slaves would whisper to each other—adding fresh details to the prodigy every time they narrated it—died away on his face, and the other expression of high resolve came back to it—it reassured Aemilia, who was lying wide-awake, wondering at her husband's long absence, and so did his words—

"All is well, Aemilia. The die is cast, and Eudoxus sails in the *Centaur* at noon to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXPIATORY SACRIFICE.

Next morning, before the second hour of the day, Eudoxus, crossing the atrium to speak with his master before starting on his journey, found Piso busily superintending the repair of the door-fastenings. Eudoxus, who, in his remote tower, had known nothing of what had occurred, was greatly astonished.

"The Master has forbidden us to speak of it," said Midas, of whom Eudoxus asked what this might mean.

Midas felt himself aggrieved—a prodigy had happened, and had been laid to his account. Was ever such a cruel case? The action of the Immortal Gods blamed on to the shoulders of a poor innocent slave! Midas revenged himself by assuming an air of mystery and suffering resignation, which produced—as he intended it should—a greater effect on Eudoxus than the story itself would have done. Eudoxus stood silent, a vague terror oppressing him. At this

moment, the fire-boy—a sharp little Cappadocian—was saying to Piso—

"May it please you, Master, when I came this morning to see to the hearth of your household Gods, the fire was burning."

"Why should it not have been burning, sirrah?" said Piso—and Eudoxus' heart sank still lower, for Piso was usually a very good-natured master. "Is it not always burning in the morning? Or do you, like an idle villain, neglect to feed it at night?"

"Crucify me, Master, if it has ever gone out since I was your focarius!" said the boy, clasping his hands together. "But last night, when the *wind*" —this he said with unutterable meaning—"blew the doors open, Midas said it blew out the fire too; but, thanks be to the Gods, Master, this morning the fire burned as clear and bright as if I had filled the brazier with coals but half an hour before."

"Here is a denarius for you," said Piso. "And see that you do not let the fire out, and see also that you talk no nonsense to alarm your mistress."

"Is it true, Master, that the wind blew the doors open last night?" asked Eudoxus, in an awe-struck voice, as Piso and he were crossing the atrium to go to the library.

"It must have been the wind—it was just as I entered the atrium, after leaving you," returned Piso,

with apparent indifference. "The worst of it is, the socket of the bar is broken."

"But, oh, Master," said Eudoxus, in the low tones of utter dismay, "there *was* no wind last night! Do you not know that this sign has happened before? It happened to your kinsman, Caius Piso."

"*Et tu, Brute?*" said Piso, with a strange smile.

Eudoxus sank on his knees, and burst into tears. Fortunately, they were by this time in the library, and no one saw him. Piso laid his hand kindly on his shoulder.

"Come, Eudoxus," he said. "Do you abandon my cause so soon? I am not about to conspire—the warning is needless."

"Oh, my dear Master! Oh, my dear Master!" sobbed Eudoxus. "Let us offer an expiatory sacrifice! Do not offend the Gods by disbelieving their warning! Do not, my dear Master, I implore you, for the sake of those dear to you, if you dare do it for your own. Oh, dear Master, I have myself doubted if there be any Gods—such thoughts may have incurred their anger. When these things happen to us, for the sake——"

"Ah, Eudoxus, there you make me a coward," replied Piso, in an altered voice. "I will offer a sacrifice to Jupiter, Best and Greatest—I will offer a white bull of Clitumnus."

He was silent for a moment—his head bent, as if in prayer. Then he continued—

"As you love me, and are my faithful servant, Eudoxus, not a syllable of this to Caius or Aulus. They would come home at once, if they knew it, to share my danger, if there be any. Whatever happens, Eudoxus, remember this—the feast of life has long since lost its savour for me, and I can rise from it, as Lucretius bids us, without murmuring."

Piso was still giving Eudoxus his final instructions, when Aemilia came in. She was very pale.

"Lucius," she said, "what is this? Have you heard that the great doors flew open last night of themselves?"

"I was in the atrium, and saw it," said Piso, smiling. "Come, my sweet Aemilia, do not torment yourself. As you know, I place little faith in omens, but, to ease the mind of our good Eudoxus, I have vowed a bull to Jupiter, in expiation. And now we must wish Eudoxus a good voyage, and let him depart."

As was to be expected, the story of the doors opening of themselves was talked of more or less openly, until it reached the ears of Silius Italicus at Puteoli, and on the appointed day, while the procession was being formed to lead the victim to the altar, Silius, Severa, Statius, and Claudia came up, all dressed in

white, with garlands of white flowers on their heads, and Silius said—

"We are come, Piso, to unite our vows to yours."

"I thank you all," replied Piso, who, whatever his religious doubts, now appeared as grave as the most devout believer could desire.

A little before Piso left his house that morning, Cornelia, already attired in the white robes of one offering a sacrifice, had taken him aside, and implored him to allow the sacrifice to be offered in her name.

"You have not a firm faith in the Immortal Gods, Lucius," she said. "The accursed speculations of the Epicureans have beguiled you from the old Roman piety, which with equal faith venerated our country and our country's Gods. Now it is highly displeasing to the Gods that any should approach them not firmly believing in their power—such persons draw down vengeance on their heads by their own prayers. Let me, therefore, offer the sacrifice, and pronounce the vow for you."

Piso took both her hands in his, and fixed his eyes on hers.

"Mother," he said, with an infinite tenderness and reverence in his voice. And as mother and son looked into each other's eyes, each divined the other's thoughts—the son knew that his mother meant to

devote herself for him, and the mother knew that her purpose was perceived.

"Nay, mother, I must offer this sacrifice alone," said Piso—and Cornelia fancied that as he spoke an unearthly light shone from his eyes—"but do not fear lest I offend the Gods by doubting them. Whether they concern themselves with the affairs of men, I know not; but from henceforth I will live as though they watched my actions and shaped my destiny. Our fathers did so, and were blessed, and I am content to be as they."

Cornelia said nothing; but on her face, too, there was that steadfast look—a look such as the old Romans of her race had worn when they set themselves to meet the foe.

It was a mild, still autumn day. The marble palaces of Baiae, rising out of the very waves, gleamed in the early morning sun, and Capreae and the Sorrentine shores swam in a golden haze, as the sacrificial procession came into the great square. First came the milk-white steer, his horns gilded, his head adorned with the red and white fillets, and round his majestic neck a wreath of autumn roses; he was led by the popes, naked to the waist, and carrying their mallets. Behind him came Piso and his family and friends, all in white robes and crowned with garlands, the women with loose-flowing hair. Just

then, the sun, rising over the mountains of Sorrento, shot a fiery dart right into the market-place. It glanced across the gilded horns of the victim, and flashed into Aemilia's eyes as she walked beside Cornelia.

The Priest, in his high-peaked, tasselled, woollen cap and white garment, stood at the altar of sacrifice in the area before the temple, with the assistant-priests, the haruspices, and the Camilli and Camillae —waiting while the procession solemnly advanced across the market-place.

A number of spectators had assembled, as word went through Baiae that Piso was about to sacrifice. The crowd increased, until the market-place was full, and the assistants had some trouble in preventing the onlookers from pressing unduly upon the worshippers.

The noble white Faliscan bull allowed the popes to lead him to the place of sacrifice without resistance, and stood there quietly, as if consenting to be offered. This, which was an excellent omen, was observed by Cornelia with eager joy. Calpurnia was pale. The portent of the doors had struck her with a terror which swallowed up the shrinking with which she had hitherto beheld the offering of a bloody sacrifice, and she never removed her eyes from her father. He stood by the victim, and was at this moment dipping his hands in the golden bowl, which the Camillus was

holding for him. The Camilla—who was the daughter of Marcellus, Duumvir of Baiae, and Calpurnia's most intimate friend—presented the purple-fringed napkin, on which Piso dried his hands. Then silence was proclaimed, and a sudden stillness—in strange contrast to the bright and joyful scene—fell on the market-place.

The Priest cast saffron into the fire, which crackled, and shot up in a clear tongue of flame. Then Piso laid his hand between the horns of the victim, and repeated the prayer of oblation after the Priest. The Priest took the salted cake, and breaking it, sprinkled the fragments on the victim's head. The Camillus poured wine into a golden cup, and the Priest, first tasting the wine himself, gave the cup to Piso, who drank; the Priest poured what was left between the horns of the victim, who now for the first time slightly winced, and shook his head, and raising up one hoof, struck the pavement. The popes stood ready to prevent his escape, but the noble beast resumed his former attitude of patient resignation, and did not move when the Priest plucked a few hairs from between his horns and threw them into the fire. Then the pope, lifting up his mallet, said, "Shall I do it?" The Priest replied, "Do it," and the mallet swung through the air, and came down with a dull crash on the victim's forehead. The noble

steer sank upon his knees, while Calpurnia, sick and giddy, clung to her mother, and could not look at the blood gushing out under the sacrificial knife. The Camilli and Camillae caught the blood in golden goblets and poured it upon the altar, while the popes opened the body of the victim, and the haruspices inspected the entrails. During all this time, Cornelia waited in intense expectation, and Aemilia, faint with excitement and apprehension of an unfavourable omen, was paler than Calpurnia.

At last, the haruspices rose from their knees, and the elder spoke aloud—while the popes began to divide the victim, and sprinkle the parts which fell to the Gods with barley-meal, and frankincense, and wine.

"The signs are favourable," he said. "The sacrifice is accepted, and the prayers of those who have offered it up are granted."

"I alone sacrificed," said Piso, hastily—but the haruspex only answered, "I have said;" and Calpurnia saw a look of exultation pass over the face of her grandmother, and felt her clutch hard at her hand.

"Why are you glad, grandmother, that the haruspex made a mistake?" she whispered.

"Hush, child!" said Cornelia. "It was no mistake, and my prayer is granted!"

CHAPTER XV.

TERTIA.

Piso, with Arulenus and Quintus, was gone to Formiae, to see Junius Mauricus. It was the day after the sacrifice, and Calpurnia was walking with her little sister Tertia in the walk called *The Procession*, because the laurels which sheltered it from the north wind were trained into the shapes of panthers with Bacchantes riding them, Silenus on his goat, and a train of Satyrs and Nymphs. The topiarius of Caius Piso, who carried out this odd whim of his master's—or, as some said, of Agrippina's—had surpassed himself. Seen even by daylight, these figures, carved in the living green of glossy laurel branches, were strangely expressive. But at night, when their outlines only could be seen against the sky, their stillness appeared—at least to Tertia's childish eyes—as the stillness of a man when he draws in his breath, of a beast about to spring, of an archer the instant before he lets fly his shaft. Tertia had

trotted along this shingly path after her mother or her grandmother, as the twilight fell, full of fearful memories of gorgons, hydras, and chimaeras, and, more dreadful still, of statues that came to life and pursued you—striding after you as you ran, with heavy stony footsteps, stopping as you stopped, but always gaining on you, until they were near enough to take you by the neck in their stony hands, and squeeze the life out of you before you could utter a cry. One story, told her by old Marulla at the vintage a year ago, always occurred to Tertia with untimely vividness just as twilight came on—of a little boy who was picked up dead, with his face as black as an Aethiopian's, and his tongue hanging out, strangled by the Thing which haunted Dama's Villa on the rock of Cumae. The identity of this Thing was not completely ascertained, but there was no doubt as to what it *did*—it strangled people who went alone to the Villa on certain days of the year. A further uncertainty hanging over the particular days of the year on which this Thing had power, most persons took the precaution of never passing near Dama's Villa after nightfall.

Marulla had distinctly said that the Thing never went anywhere else; but it seemed to Tertia dreadfully easy for one or more of the old topiarius's leafy men and women to give themselves a shake in the

evening breeze, and step down for a stroll. That Nymph turning to the Satyr, with her arm uplifted, did not look like that five minutes ago—

"Calpurnia, I wish you would come back to mother," said Tertia at last, unable to bear it any longer. "I am sure you must have finished brother Caius's letter. You read it *me* twice, you know, yesterday. I believe there is a wolf in the hedge—I'm sure I heard something move. Oh, sister, there *is* something—something coming—— "

"You foolish child, it is only grandmother and the coral-seller of the Grotto," said Calpurnia, as Tertia clung trembling to her. "What will grandmother say to you for being frightened at nothing at all?"

The walk was long, and was intersected by other walks, and down one of these cross-ways Calpurnia saw her grandmother standing, talking to a young woman, whom she instantly recognized as a Thessalian Jewess named Theophila, who had been telling fortunes and selling coral in the Grotto for several months past.

At the same moment that Calpurnia saw her grandmother, Cornelia herself turned, and beckoned to her. Tertia, all her fears forgotten, began to run along the alley, calling back to her sister,

"Come, quick, sister—perhaps she will show us her pretty things."

But, although Theophila had the case upon her arm which Tertia knew contained all sorts of pretty things made of coral and tortoiseshell, it was shut up, and Theophila did not offer to open it. Cornelia had moved down the alley to Calpurnia, so that they met half-way. Cornelia appeared to be refusing Theophila's entreaty to be allowed to tell her fortune.

"It is all nonsense," she was saying. "I do not believe you believe it yourself."

"Indeed, Madam," replied Theophila, "it seems as strange to me as to you. I do not understand it—all I can say is, my fortunes have never come false, and have often, to my own knowledge, come true."

"If they do, it can only be chance," answered Cornelia, now close to Calpurnia and little Tertia.

It struck Calpurnia that her grandmother was very mild and condescending, and that Theophila, while very respectful, seemed perfectly unabashed and self-possessed. It was not Cornelia's way to permit herself to be pestered with solicitations. She was generous to beggars, as became a great lady; but they were never encouraged to thrust themselves upon her. Calpurnia was still more surprised, when Theophila, saying, "At least, the illustrious lady will permit me to see the hand of her gracious granddaughter," calmly took Calpurnia's left hand, and began to peer into the lines of the palm; while

Cornelia, watching her with a slight smile, said, apparently unoffended at the liberty, "Well, what do you read there?"

Theophila's head-covering—a bright saffron handkerchief, with a many-coloured fringe—had fallen on her neck, showing the plaited masses of her black hair. She was still young, and would have been beautiful, but for the haggardness of her cheeks and the restless wildness of her eyes, which seemed to be always seeking something they could never find. She was a long while looking at Calpurnia's hand—once, she hastily opened her own left hand, and seemed to compare it with Calpurnia's. Tertia stood, with mouth and eyes wide open, looking at the curious necklace Theophila wore, which was a wonderfully exact imitation of a serpent, his tail in his jaws. Tertia fancied the ruby eyes of the serpent blinked at her, and she inserted one hand in the folds of her grandmother's dress, and held the dress like a screen between herself and the fortune-teller, keeping her eyes, however, still fixed with horrid fascination on the serpent's eyes.

"Well," said Cornelia, at last—and Calpurnia's heart gave a great leap, although even she did not put much faith in a common fortune-teller like Theophila.

"There is much which is not clear to me," said the

Jewess, and Calpurnia thought she spoke unwillingly. "I see absence, and a great love; but not a lover's love—there is a lover's love too—and there is trouble, and distance—oh, a great distance—and great dangers—and a cruel enemy—her hand is like mine—I will tell you no more!"

"You have frightened the poor child," said Cornelia, and she drew the girl's arm within her own. Then she whispered something which Calpurnia did not hear. "You understand, then," she said aloud. "And stay—I will buy the coral you showed me."

Theophila opened her treasures, and Cornelia took the trinket she had chosen. It was a closed hand, with the index and fourth fingers extended so as to form horns, and was intended as a charm against the Evil Eye. Cornelia announced that this purchase was made for Tertia's benefit, and that it would become her property as soon as she mastered certain difficulties in the alphabet, and in particular attained to clearer views of the letters M and N.

"I know them—I do really, grandmother!" cried Tertia, fairly skipping about for impatience, as she walked by her grandmother's side. "M has three strokes—I *do* know it—father showed me the V in the middle, and I always know it now. I have known it *ever* so long—three days at least."

"You shall bring me your dice into the library and

show me," replied Cornelia, somewhat relaxing the severity which was, she considered, essential in the training of youth. "And now run to the end of the alley, and try if you can see your mother."

This involved passing the Procession of Bacchus; but it was not yet the tenth hour of the day—being indeed not yet quite supper-time—and, of course, broad daylight, and Cornelia and Calpurnia were close at hand. Under these favourable circumstances, there was a certain fearful pleasure in rushing past the Procession, and imagining it on the point of coming to life. The Jewess was quite out of sight—by this time, no doubt, on the road to the Grotto. So Tertia set off at full speed, reflecting, as she reached the first panther, that, when she had her charm, she would perhaps hardly be much frightened even in the dark.

"Calpurnia," said Cornelia, directly Tertia was out of hearing. "Do you love your father?"

"Grandmother!" cried Calpurnia.

"I want deeds, not words, child. Do you love him well enough to do what I tell you?"

"I think so, grandmother," faltered Calpurnia.

"You know—for I have told you," said Cornelia—"that Domitian is jealous of your father, as he was jealous of Agricola, and that he keeps us here in what is in reality exile because he is afraid, if your

father were in Rome, the Romans might remember a Piso was once proclaimed heir to the Roman Empire —a Piso far inferior in renown and in abilities to your father. Agricola's death has increased your father's danger, because it has brought him one step nearer to the first place among Domitian's generals. Publius Crassus means us harm—tell me, child, you do not admire him? You are not deceived by his courtier's arts?" Cornelia almost shook poor Calpurnia as she asked this.

"Admire him, grandmother? I can't endure him!" said Calpurnia. "I am afraid of him—he has such a horrid way of looking at you, as though he was thinking, 'Ah, I could make you do anything I liked.'"

"Always think that of him!" cried Cornelia. "Fear him and hate him. But it is not of this I have to speak. I am going to meet Theophila to-night—at midnight—she will consult her spirits for me. I have told her I wish to consult them about your marriage. I do not forget the fate of Soranus, and I have therefore provided myself with a harmless pretext. Well?" Cornelia spoke sharply, for she felt Calpurnia shrink.

"Dear grandmother," said the girl, much distressed. "Is it not very dangerous to consult sorcerers—against the law, too? And the Jewess is

not even an astrologer—only a common fortune-teller."

"She is a Thessalian," replied Cornelia, "and they suck magic with their mother's milk. She is a Jewess too, by race, and the Jews know all the lore of the Chaldaeans. Listen, Calpurnia, while I talk to you as to a woman, and not a foolish girl. I must know into which scale to cast myself. Remember the ominous words of the Vergilian Lots—they have rung in my ears like a funeral lament ever since! What if, in urging your father to action, I am urging him to his ruin? I am in thick darkness—any glimmer of light is better than none. You heard, Calpurnia, the words of the haruspex—what were they?"

"That the prayers of those who had sacrificed were heard," replied Calpurnia.

"Yes, *those*," said Cornelia, exultantly. "Swear never to tell your father or mother, and I will tell you something."

"I swear it," said Calpurnia, trembling.

"I did not lay my hand on the victim's head," said Cornelia, "and yet the haruspex said '*those;*' but he spoke under a divine impulse, for, while your father prayed, I, too, offered up a vow—that if the Immortal Gods required a victim, I devoted myself for my son's safety. That was my prayer—and the

haruspex said it was heard. The omens were, as you know, remarkably favourable."

"Dear grandmother," said Calpurnia, in tears, and as much moved by this self-devotion as Cornelia had expected her to be, "I will go wherever you desire."

CHAPTER XVI.

DAMA'S VILLA.

In these days of Piso's absence, Aemilia had ample leisure to think. She was rather glad that Cornelia had taken such a fancy to walk in the gardens with the children. She wanted to be alone, to ponder undisturbed on many things. The life at Baiae had never seemed to her so wearisome before. She had plenty of callers—a batch of fine ladies, with a couple of still finer gentlemen in attendance, had taken up half her morning, and Calpurnia slipped through the atrium just in time to avoid another batch, when she left her grandmother to go and put on her dinner dress. But Aemilia did not care for these fashionable visitors, and returned their calls at the longest intervals permitted by civility. Her chief women-friends were in Rome; Aemilia did not frequent the baths, and none of the diversions of Baiae were to her taste. The curled, oiled, silk-bedizened fops, who

spent their days between the porticos and the baths, and who always seemed just ready to expire with well-bred languor, inspired her with loathing. Nor could the vileness of their vices be entirely concealed from her, when so many of them took care to parade these vices as ostentatiously as they did the splendour of their houses and the elegance of their attire. Moreover, Aemilia was just now oppressed by a sense of coming change. It could hardly be called a presentiment; it had too visible a foundation. So many circumstances had occurred to foreshow an end of the present uneventful, but untroubled monotony. Among all these circumstances the most actively disquieting were the reports which Crassus had brought of Aulus Atticus and the proposal he had made for Calpurnia's hand.

Aemilia had loved Aulus as another son. His mother had been a friend of her youth. As she herself had loved and honoured her Lucius, so, thought Aemilia, would Calpurnia be able to love and honour Aulus. Domitian could not live for ever. If Flavius Clemens, or his sons, succeeded, all would be well. Good men would flourish once more. Aulus would become as distinguished as he already was honourable and virtuous—for the rest Aemilia was not very ambitious, and the Calpurnii were sufficiently illustrious to dispense with new honours. And yet Aemilia

was jealous for her husband, and bitterly felt that he had been robbed of that inheritance of glory which he had received from the long line of his ancestors.

Aemilia lay on her bed, watching the night-lamp flicker on the figures painted upon the wall. They represented the Hours of the night. The figure of the Third Hour—a veiled, mysterious shape, pointing through darkness with outstretched hand—seemed to have gathered to itself all the glimmering light, and to show more distinctly than the rest. "Hush!" it seemed to say. "What is going on upon the earth at this hour?" A very slight sound seemed to reach Aemilia's ear, like a stealthy footstep. She rose, and pushing aside the curtain of the door, looked out into the small inner court on which several of the sleeping rooms opened. Her favourite tire-woman Nadia lay asleep across the threshold, and stirred uneasily as Aemilia looked out, but all else was still.

Perhaps, however, Aemilia had heard something, for just at that moment Calpurnia, wrapped in a thick mantle, and clinging to Cornelia, was standing outside the postern gate, where Chrysippus, Cornelia's coachman and one of her most trusted servants, was waiting for them. He had a small shaded lantern in his hand, and by its light he led them down to that gate of the grounds which opened on the Cumaean road, and there they found a chaise, into which he

helped them, and then, mounting in front, set out at a trot in the direction of Cumae.

"Are we not going to the Grotto, grandmother?" whispered Calpurnia.

"Of course not, foolish child," replied Cornelia, also whispering. "Every one would know that we went. We are going where no one will be any the wiser. You are sure you have your amulet? That is right."

The pale crescent moon was soon lost behind the hills in front, and a misty dimness almost hid the stars.

There were two horses to the chaise, and they went at a good pace. Calpurnia's curiosity had at the moment got the better of her fears. She wondered if they were going to Baiae by the cross-road? But no; Chrysippus whipped up his horses, who showed a disposition to take the accustomed turning, and they spun along towards Cumae—the road gleaming white amidst the surrounding darkness. They had gone on thus for some time, when the unpleasant recollection occurred to Calpurnia that it was said a gang of robbers haunted the Gallinarian Wood. The wood was still a long way off—beyond Cumae—but at this rate they would soon be in Cumae. She spoke to her grandmother once or twice, out of sheer loneliness and dreariness, but Cornelia was evidently disinclined to talk. Suddenly, the horses shied violently,

almost upsetting the carriage into the thick undergrowth which bordered the road just there. Calpurnia uttered a low cry, and clung closer to her grandmother.

"What do you mean, spawn of a Campanian wolf, frightening the horses of travellers like that?" cried Chrysippus, as a tall figure, with a cloak drawn over its head, rose up from the shadow. This late wayfarer seemed, by the way he scrambled to his feet, to have fallen asleep by the roadside, and to have been as much startled as the horses; but before he recovered himself, the horses, breaking into a canter after their fright, were far out of sight or hearing, and it was much too dark for either party to recognize the other.

At last the road began to ascend more rapidly, and the moon came in sight again, floating underneath a shoal of fleecy clouds which had suddenly gathered. Still Chrysippus drove on, until Calpurnia thought they must surely be going to Cumae. They were very near. The Rock of Cumae rose in front of them, crowned with the black outline of the Temple of Apollo. Suddenly, Chrysippus drew up his horses, and leapt down from the chaise.

"Here we must get out, and walk up the hill," said Cornelia, and alighted.

"Tell me, grandmother, where are we going?" whispered Calpurnia, seized with a sudden panic, as

she stood by her grandmother on the dark roadside. "Not to Dama's Villa?"

"Why not, you silly child?" replied Cornelia. "What place could be better for persons who do not wish to be followed by prying eyes? Shake off these childish fears, unworthy of my granddaughter." Then she turned to Chrysippus. "Drive the chaise into the bushes," she said, "fasten the horses securely, and then follow us."

But the precaution was scarcely necessary, for the reputation of the place they were bound for would have effectually deterred most people from going that way after nightfall.

The sorceress had taken up her temporary quarters in a ruinous building, once intended to be the bath of the villa which Milichus, the freedman of Flavius Scaevinus, began to build with the price of his betrayal of Caius Piso's conspiracy. Milichus himself was soon accused of being implicated with Soranus and Thrasea. The wretched man concealed himself for several weeks in his own unfinished halls, hoping to get on board a ship and flee to Asia. But his freedman Dama betrayed him, and he killed himself as the soldiers sent to take him entered the villa. His betrayer was shortly afterwards found dead on the same spot, and a report got about that a larva haunted the place. Nero's death followed, and the

civil wars, and no one cared to build houses which he might never inherit, or dig wine-presses for other men to drink the wine. The miasma from the Acherusian Marsh made Cumae unhealthy, the city had declined, the tide of life had flowed away to the Gulf of Puteoli, and Dama's Villa—for that was the name which clung to it—was left desolate.

No one cared to claim it. Peasants, coming this way after sunset, had seen a figure furtively peering at them from between the columns, from behind a broken wall, or from among the bushes. The instant your eye fell on this figure, it was gone—to reappear behind some other covert, whence in like manner it vanished the instant the eye followed it. And so, from column to column, from bush to bush, it slid, never really seen; for no sooner had one passer-by said to his companion, "See, there is a man looking at us from old Dama's Villa!" than whatever it was had vanished from the portico, and was watching from behind the great bole of the plane-tree. But the peasants all knew what it was—it was the ghost of Milichus, watching for Dama, who used to bring him food, and who betrayed him at last, as Milichus had betrayed his own master, and who, as every one knew, was strangled by the ghost of Milichus when he went to take possession of the Villa.

Calpurnia knew all these stories—her old nurse

had told them to her a hundred times—and they rose up in her memory with dreadful distinctness, as her grandmother hurried her along.

Every step seemed to take them further from the haunts of men. Cumae itself, as Calpurnia knew, was half deserted, and the grass was growing in the streets. The acanthus and the wild vine twined round the pillars of Dama's portico, and brambles made a thicket of his roofless chambers. The whole hill on which the old Acropolis of the Greek city stood, was hollowed with caverns, where once the Cumaean Sibyl told of the things which should come to pass—yet the sacrilegious Milichus had not feared to set up his unhallowed walls, cemented with the blood of his master and patron, on the very ground consecrated by the ancient Oracle, and almost in the shadow of the Temple of Apollo the Healer!

This was the place where Theophila had given Cornelia rendezvous. The night struck chill, and a dense white mist lay over the country on the other side, completely obliterating every feature of the landscape, even to the sea-line. The pale light of the crescent-moon—lying on her back, and now very near her setting—glimmered sickly on the surface of the mist, and made it seem a vast, ghostly, stagnant sea, into which that part of Cumae which was built low down seemed to be plunging headlong.

The land was fertile, though unhealthy, and the rank-growing bushes appeared to Calpurnia to assume threatening shapes, as she and her grandmother hurried past them. To the right rose the Temple of Apollo, which presently shut out the moon, and then towered so black and huge among the pale and watery stars, that Calpurnia was seized with a sudden terror lest it should fall upon them. This was the shrine of the Cumaean Sybil—what if Apollo should be angry with the presumptuous mortal who dared come here to consult a strange, and perhaps unlawful oracle? Earthquakes often shook this soil, which felt so solid beneath their feet, but was all hollow with the ancient caverns. What if Apollo were to send an earthquake to-night? Calpurnia gave a gasp and clutched at her grandmother's arm, or she would have fallen, so violently did her knees knock together with terror and cold. Cornelia caught her round the waist.

"Foolish girl!" she said, in her clear, decisive voice—clear even in a whisper. "What do you fear? Am I not here? and have you not your talisman? And are you not come on an errand of filial piety? I am ashamed of you! Is this your Roman blood? If you are indeed a Roman maiden, pluck up your courage! When I, an old woman, do not fear, will you turn craven?"

"Forgive me, grandmother," said poor Calpurnia, her teeth chattering in spite of all her efforts. "It had grown so dark, I was afraid—I will be braver."

And, indeed, the moral awe which Cornelia inspired in Calpurnia was for the moment stronger than the fear even of Apollo's vengeance.

Cornelia kept her arm round Calpurnia, and half supported her, until, after a hundred paces farther on, they reached the deserted Villa.

The portico caught the last rays of the moonlight, as the moon sank into the mists of the horizon. Two of the columns had fallen—or perhaps had never been placed in position. The dim outlines of blocks of stone, and of more or less ruined walls, could be seen—their whiteness made more visible by the background of thicket which had everywhere encroached on the space once cleared that man might dwell there. But man had suffered his title to lapse, and Nature had stepped in and taken possession once more. A cypress-tree which had sprung up in front of the portico seemed a tall, black sentinel, guarding the entrance from rash intruders; but there was no sign of inhabitant, and all was dark and silent within the ruins.

"Wait for us here, Chrysippus," said Cornelia, "and do not enter unless you hear my whistle."

Then, still holding Calpurnia in that strong, re-

assuring grasp, she crossed the grass-grown threshold, and, passing between two walls which formed a short, wide passage, entered what was to have been the atrium of Dama's Villa.

A deserted house—or any other place whence life has fled away—always strikes cold on the heart. Empty chambers and a hearth grown cold are so much like death, that the warm, living blood curdles at seeing them. But a stranger and keener desolation broods over a house which has never been dwelt in. It is a dead body that was never a living one. And this deserted, never-inhabited place had memories —not the wholesome memories of daily life, of comings and goings, and domestic cares and joys, but accursed memories of wrong and murder, ingratitude and betrayal, retribution and despair. These unfinished chambers and corridors had never sheltered an honest family; but in them had lurked the treacherous murderer of his master, who in many a midnight hour of terror had learned that ill-gotten gains bring Heaven's curse with them. Somewhere here—in the hall built with the reward of blood—Milichus had heard the tramp of Nero's soldiers, to whom he had not long before betrayed his master, and had let his miserable life flow from him over this very pavement. Perhaps his uneasy ghost was hovering near at this moment. In the dark shadows

thrown by the plane-trees which had shot up inside the atrium, it seemed to Calpurnia that she was walking in blood.

"Why do you tremble so, Calpurnia? I know the way—I have been here before," said Cornelia. "But this comes of being but half a Roman. I will wait until you are less agitated. You must not appear thus terrified, or the rites cannot be performed. Will you fail me, Calpurnia?"

"No, grandmother," said Calpurnia, stung into temporary courage by this implied reflection on her Italian ancestors. And with the strongest effort of will she had ever yet exercised, she desperately put her cold hand into Cornelia's, and said, "Lead me, grandmother, whithersoever you will."

"There speaks the blood of the Scipios!" said Cornelia, her hand closing firmly on Calpurnia's.

She led her between the bramble-grown fragments of masonry which encumbered the ruined chambers, until, in the remotest part of the Villa, they saw a light gleaming like a star from what at first seemed to be the ground itself; but a few steps more showed it to be placed on the threshold of the door of a low building.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INCANTATION.

"Enter, and bring the lamp with you," said a voice.

It must be Theophila's, thought Calpurnia; but it reminded her of some other voice—and so had Theophila's that afternoon—a soft, sweet voice, with a liquid foreign accent—a voice which had some unpleasant association connected with it.

Meanwhile, Cornelia had lighted the iron lamp, and stepped over the threshold. Calpurnia followed her, much reassured now she had heard this familiar voice, and they found themselves in what had been intended for the calidarium of the baths of the Villa. It was a long apartment, rather low, but with an arched roof. It seemed to have been more nearly completed than the other portions of the Villa, and therefore to have suffered less from time and neglect. There was another lamp at the farther end, and near it a figure sat on the ground, wearing a garland.

Fire was burning upon a tripod, and also upon what seemed an altar. On a marble slab, fixed in the wall, and doubtless intended for some purpose of the bath, stood a brass bason, two candlesticks with candles in them, and several small caskets and phials of peculiar shape and colour. But Calpurnia's attention was chiefly fixed on the figure. It rose as they approached, and Calpurnia saw that it was Theophila—wrapped from head to foot in a dark mantle, with a hood drawn closely over the head. In the imperfect light, made more uncertain still by a thin smoke or mist which seemed to gather at that end of the bath, her face had an unearthly pallor, heightened by the contrast of her gleaming eyes. All the life of her face was concentrated in her eyes—they were full of restless, eager life; the rest of her face had an awful stillness. Calpurnia, as she looked at her, remembered another wild tale of her old nurse's—of a young man who, as he was carried out to his burial, had been recalled to life for a moment by a great physician who met the funeral procession, and, sitting up on the bier, had denounced his wife—drowned in crocodile tears—as his murderess. The young man must have looked just like Theophila, thought Calpurnia, and her blood ran cold again.

"You are late," said Theophila, "and the moon has set. But we will try. I am ready. Have you

brought with you anything belonging to the person on whose behalf you are inquiring of the spirits?"

"I have a few threads of a garment," replied Cornelia, giving her something.

"That is excellent," said Theophila. "A portion of the hair or nails would have been better still; but, next to that, a piece of a garment the person has worn is most effectual. We can only summon the astral spirits to-night—they are the most harmless of all, and our human wills are far stronger than theirs. Do you fear them?"

"My body fears supernatural beings," said Cornelia, "but my mind does not yield. My young granddaughter, however, is more timid."

"She will be perfectly safe within the circle I shall draw," said the sorceress. "Has she got the talisman you spoke of?"

"Here it is—round her neck," said Cornelia, opening Calpurnia's dress to show the emerald.

"It is engraved, as I told you when you showed it me, with the Seal of Solomon," said Theophila. "No spirit—not even those from the Abyss—could hurt a pure virgin while she wore that sign, and remained within the circle. And now, take off your shoes, cover your heads, and kneel here on this lamb's skin. And now remember, whatever happens, do not speak—do not utter even an 'Oh!'—after I

begin the invocation, until I bid you. And when I bid you, ask what you would know in a loud, clear voice—as though you were commanding a reply from a slave, and not as though you were craving a response from an oracle. These spirits must be commanded, not entreated."

As she spoke, Theophila stepped back into the misty farther side of the room, and appeared to draw an ashen-grey curtain behind her—or else the mist gathered itself together into the semblance of such a curtain. Surely, though, it *was* a curtain, for in a moment Theophila parted it, and came out.

She had cast off the dark enshrouding mantle, and now appeared clad all in white, with a fillet round her long, dishevelled black hair, and a little band worked with some strange device upon her right arm. On her head was a crown of vervain, and in her hand a small trident. Her face was more rigid, and her eyes more burning than ever. She took a coal from the altar, and with it traced, first a double circle, and then many other strange figures, on the earthen floor, around Cornelia and Calpurnia. Then she sprinkled the floor with water from the bason. Next she extinguished one of the lamps, and lighted the two candles, which began to splutter out a rain of red sparks. Theophila carried the other lamp to a corner of the room, and then, returning to the altar, cast

wood on it, placed the bason on the ground beside it, and sprinkled the fires on the altar and the tripod with the contents of one of the bottles. A strange, heavy perfume instantly filled the room, and the fires began to crackle and emit a thick, white smoke. Theophila took the wand, and, standing between the tripod and the altar, threw some of the threads which Cornelia had brought on each of the fires, and began the invocation, turning to the four quarters of heaven, for the four elements, and breathing into the air, and over the earth, fire, and water, as she called on the elementary spirits.

Except for a name here and there, the words were unintelligible to her hearers. At first, her voice was low, and sounded far off; but it grew louder and louder, until it filled the air, and rose higher and higher, until it seemed as if it would cleave the walls asunder. And yet it never seemed to come from very near, but rather to be the reverberation of some great volume of sound proceeding from many voices. And as Calpurnia listened trembling, Theophila's voice rose higher, and took a still wilder tone, and broke into a sort of chant—perhaps the very same in which the builders of Babel called upon the stars of heaven.

"Oh, Thurban, Oh, Altrameeh!" she wailed—and her voice was like the wind swelling and dying away

among the trees of the forest—"Oh, Merak, Alioth, Mizar, Benetnasch! Oh, Alderamin, Schedar and Flamak, Algenib and Algol! Oh, Hamal, Aldebaran, Dira, and Nethra! Oh, Almured! Oh, Zuben and Sadalmelik! Oh, Rigel, Aschere, and Ashemie——"

A few of these names reached Cornelia's awe-stricken ears, and she knew that Theophila was invoking the spirits of those great stars which lead the shining hosts of the constellations on their eternal march around the unsteady Pole.

As the invocation proceeded, Calpurnia was aware of a strange sensation—she seemed to herself to be asleep, yet awake—lulled by the potent perfumes, and carried away on the waves of Theophila's voice. She was aware that her body knelt by Cornelia's side, and that Cornelia's head was bowed over her clasped hands; her thoughts were not confused—they had never been more active—she knew, although Cornelia had never told her, what was the question she had come to ask. It rang like a refrain, "Shall Lucius Piso be Emperor?" And it seemed to Calpurnia that a voice was asking the question; but it was not the voice of Cornelia—it was the voice of Demetrius the Cynic. And all the while she was thinking of other things—of her brother Caius, and Aulus Atticus, her playfellow; of her cousin Quintus, and her friend Marcella; of Agricola, and of all the other people she

had known—and all the while she was listening to the invocation, which went swelling on in a rhythmic rise and fall, more pleading, more commanding every moment. Then Theophila seemed to grow taller and larger, and her eyes more flaming, and she waved her wand more wildly, until, with a great cry, "Oh, Michael, Raphael, Anael! Oh, Gedulael! Oh, Geburael! Oh, Tiphereth, Binal!" she ceased, and Calpurnia seemed to wake out of a trance. The flame shot up on the tripod, and Theophila cast into it a branch of vervain.

And then a strong wind blew in from behind where they knelt, the misty curtain behind Theophila wavered, its folds took strange shapes, as of shadowy figures that came and went, and came again, and the icy wind blew so furiously that Calpurnia slipped from her knees on to the ground, and lay there, and knew no more.

Cornelia, too, felt that icy wind, and her heart seemed to stand still. A thick darkness hid everything—the crackling flames, and Theophila, and those half-visible shapes lurking in the curtain's folds. But there was a whispering and rustling all round her, as of a forest in the north wind—and only the north wind could blow so cold. And Theophila cried, "Speak! Speak! Ask! Ask!"

Cornelia herself, as she knelt, shook like one of the

trees of the forest, but she called out, quick and loud, "Shall I have my heart's desire?"

"Which of them, Cornelia? For you have many." The words were like the rustling of leaves, and there were many speakers, some near, some far away.

"The greatest," said Cornelia.

"The greatest shall be granted you; but not the others—not the others," said the whispering voices.

"What shall I do? Oh, tell me what I must do?" cried Cornelia, as the voices seemed to be departing. "How shall my desire be accomplished?"

"Wish high enough," sighed the invisible presences. And like an echo that repeats itself as it dies away, Cornelia heard them say, "High enough—high enough"—fainter and fainter, till all was still, and the mist rolled aside, and Theophila stood there alone, and the branch of vervain was still crackling in the flames.

"You came too late—the moon was down. I thought they would not answer to-night," said Theophila, as she poured water on the tripod, and unclasped the talisman from her arm. "And then *she* was too much afraid." She pointed to Calpurnia.

"Did you hear nothing? See nothing?" asked Cornelia. "Did you not feel the wind? Did you not see the mist—the darkness?"

"No," replied Theophila. "It was not more misty

than it is now—the room is half full of smoke, it is true. Why did you not ask the questions when I bade you? Were *you* also afraid?"

Cornelia, who, as well as her trembling limbs would allow her, was trying to raise Calpurnia, looked at the sorceress in amazement. "Did you not hear me speak?" she asked.

"You did not speak," replied Theophila. "You knelt there all the time, but you never spoke when I bade you. When the smoke rolled so thick I thought they were coming, but Calpurnia's fainting spoiled it, no doubt. If we were in Rome, we could have tried a more potent spell, but I have never invoked any but the astral spirits. You should go to Ascletario, if you really want to know anything. I only profess the lesser magic. Your will was not strong enough, because you were frightened; but Ascletario knows spells which they *must* obey—he can even compel the Powers themselves."

Theophila had extinguished the two strange candles (they were made of human fat), and as soon as she had done so, the mist seemed to disperse—the curtain was no longer visible, if it ever had a tangible existence. Then, having lighted the other lamp, and wrapped herself in her cloak—she came and sprinkled water on Calpurnia, as she lay with her head pillowed on her grandmother's knees.

Calpurnia gasped, and opened her eyes. "Are they gone?" she said.

"They never came, my pretty lady," said Theophila. "Your fainting spoiled the charm."

Cornelia laid a warning pressure on Calpurnia's shoulder. Theophila was putting on Calpurnia's shoes.

"We will go," she said. "Another time we may be more fortunate." She gave Theophila gold as she spoke.

"I do not take it when they do not come," said Theophila, not putting out her hand for the money.

"Then take it as a gift, and not as a payment," said Cornelia, and added, in a whisper, "you can, in return for it, send me news sometimes." She laid the gold piece on the slab, and drawing Calpurnia's cloak closely about her, whispered again for a few moments with Theophila, and departed. Theophila accompanied them to the end of the atrium, carrying the lamp.

Beyond the portico, under the cypress, stood Chrysippus, just as they had left him. The road down the hill was extremely dark—the clouds had gathered and the wind had risen—and Calpurnia stumbled more than once before they reached the spot where the carriage was.

Cornelia held Calpurnia closely to her, as they

drove home, but neither of them spoke a word—not even when a violent storm of wind and rain broke over them, almost drenching them. Nor did they speak when they had entered the Villa by the postern-door, and stolen softly to their chambers, where Calpurnia, chilled to the bone, sank into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion, while Cornelia lay long awake, trying to solve the problem of Theophila's good faith. Had she in very deed seen and heard nothing? And if so, had Cornelia's own fancy conjured up an hallucination? Or had Theophila feigned unconsciousness for some purpose of her own? "May be," thought Cornelia, with a spasm of terror, "the voices I heard were a trick. Either she did not hear them, as she says, or her accomplices have deceived me—and if so, Demetrius speaks the truth in persisting that there is a plot on foot. But I named no name, and my question might refer to nothing more important than Calpurnia's marriage. I do not think Theophila is a traitress; but if she has deceived me in this, she must have a weighty reason. '*Wish high enough*,' they said—that must mean that I should wish the Empire for Lucius."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CYNIC'S WARNING.

When Piso returned to Baiae, he found Calpurnia looking pale. She was just recovering from a slight attack of fever, which Aemilia attributed to her having stayed out in the gardens too late the day Piso went to Formiae. A certain air of fearfulness and mystery seemed to hang about the household, which Piso was quick to perceive, although he affected to be blind. He observed that the slaves avoided the atrium as much as possible after nightfall, and that the Janitor had the fire-boy to sleep with him of a night. After what had happened, it was not much to be wondered at. To Arulenus and Mauricus, Piso had represented the opening of the doors as due to a gust of wind, and the sacrifice as a tribute to the women's fears; but in his secret heart, he did not believe the wind was strong enough, that night at any rate, to produce such an effect, and he still inclined to suspect a trick. This suspicion was only confirmed

when, while he was engaged in superintending the opening of the vats on the ninth day, Pansa let fall something which led Piso to question him. Pansa had observed *à propos* of a neighbour's wine going sour, that portents never came alone, as one might see by what was going on at the Villa.

"What is going on there?" asked Piso, so sternly, that it was with great difficulty he got out of Pansa that "ever since the night the doors opened of their own accord"—an expression everybody persisted in using—there had been noises heard in the atrium, as of one walking up and down and weeping. The janitor Midas swore that he awoke one night, and saw the statue of the Great Africanus, which stood in the middle of the eastern side, descend from its pedestal, go up to the altar of the Penates, and stand before it, wringing its hands. Then the horses were constantly found in the morning all of a sweat.

"I have only been away three days," said Piso.

"Well, twice at least, Master, the thing has happened," said Pansa. "Now, how can horses get all of a sweat when they have never stirred from their stable? How can they be trembling all over? Ask Stentor, the master of the horses——"

But it was not the dreams of Midas, or the fertile imagination of his Thessalian groom which made Piso return to the Villa with so grave a look on his face,

that the gardeners, as he passed them while they were trimming the arbutus hedge, said one to the other that the wine had gone sour—as was to be expected with these new-fangled covers for letting off the fumes. But a more serious cause than even the wine turning sour had made Piso's brow so dark. At almost the very same point in the road at which he had met Demetrius before, Piso had met him again.

"Hail, Piso," he had said. "Well, you have sent Eudoxus to Athens, and you have heard the Panegyric on Thrasea, which I gave you for a sign. Tell me, Piso, did they say at Formiae when Domitian should return?"

"Nay, Demetrius," Piso had answered. "How should they know? It is you who profess omniscience."

"Nay; there is much I do not know," returned Demetrius, with perfect gravity. "I know less, even, than I might know. Domitian, Piso, will return in January, and the news will reach Rome in December."

"We are not yet at the Nones of November," said Piso, with an assumption of indifference. "Your information, Demetrius, is early; but how it should affect me I know not."

"Nor do I know, as yet," said Demetrius. "Yet I know there is danger—danger from Crassus, and danger from Domitian. All that Crassus tells you is true; yet beware of believing it. If you believe it,

you are lost to a certainty. If you do *not* believe it —why, perhaps even then you are lost. I have warned you."

"You are oracular, Demetrius," said Piso, rather sarcastically. "If you knew *me* as well as you would have me believe that you know my most private affairs, you would know that I am not a man to be moved by dark hints or to be scared by mysterious threats. Mystery and imposture have ever been allies. I laugh at them both."

"Yet you obeyed my warning, and Caius and Aulus will not return in May," replied Demetrius, quietly, his keen grey eyes fixed on Piso, as though they were reading his inmost soul.

A dark flush rose to Piso's brow. "Other circumstances decided me," he said haughtily. "I have told you often, Demetrius, that you have taken the wrong way with me. Speak out, if you have aught to say. I am not a boy, to be afraid of a noise I hear in the dark."

"And yet, Piso, as you spoke you turned pale," replied Demetrius, with the same quiet gravity which impressed Piso a little in spite of all his scepticism. "There *are* noises, Piso, at which even a brave heart quails, and the animal spirits, like a flock of frightened sheep, run back to take refuge in it, till the heart is ready to burst for fear." He looked steadily at Piso.

"And if I grant that this is possible," said Piso, meeting his gaze; "what then? The body may tremble, but the mind laughs at the foolish body, and goes its way in spite of it."

"You are a brave man, Piso," said Demetrius—as it seemed, with involuntary admiration—"and, while you call yourself an Epicurean, are truly a Stoic."

"Nay, Demetrius," said Piso. "If I must choose a Master, it shall be Plato, and *his* Master, Socrates."

"They are the Masters of us all," said Demetrius, thoughtfully. He was silent for a moment, while Piso's eyes, wandering to the hillside, saw old Marulla coming down on her donkey.

"We are interrupted," said Demetrius, quickly, perceiving her approach. "Remember—he comes in January. And I will give you another sign. Apollonius of Tyana will be sent for from Ephesus in December. Farewell."

Demetrius strode away, his long ungainly legs devouring the road, his cloak flying out as he walked; and Piso was soon overtaken by old Marulla, who implored him to tell her whether it was true that the Procession of Bacchus had walked three times round the atrium at midnight, three nights ago, and that in the morning all the horses in the stables were sweating and trembling, as though they had just run in the chariot races.

CHAPTER XIX.

CALPURNIA.

Calpurnia awoke the morning after her visit to Dama's Villa with a racking headache and pains in all her limbs. Little Tertia, who ran into her room as usual, to see if her sister was dressed, fetched Tryphosa, and presently Aemilia came. Warm drinks of betony and agaric, mixed with hydromel, were given to the patient. She was wrapped up and encouraged to sleep. But sleep would not come, and the dreams which had disturbed the heavy slumbers in which she had been tossing before daybreak, made Calpurnia almost prefer her waking thoughts, though they were sufficiently harassing. All through those dreams it had always seemed to her that some one had said, "The Emperor is coming back, and you will go to Rome." She was always standing in the atrium, a cold wind blowing in at the open doors, as she heard these words. A victim was being offered at the altar of the Penates—Calpurnia thought it was a lamb

—then suddenly, to her horror, she had seen that it was little Tertia; then there was a great clang of brazen doors, and one cried, "Caesar has returned, and Piso must start to-night for Rome." Then suddenly, Caius and Aulus came in at the doors—Aulus grown very tall, with a strange look upon his face, and Calpurnia thought she ran to him, and cried, "Oh, Aulus, save my Father!" and Aulus clasped her in his arms—for Calpurnia thought she slipped and fell—and he said, "I will save him;" and then, behold, it was not Aulus, but Crassus, with that evil smile on his face, and at the same moment Calpurnia had perceived that she had slipped in a little stream of Tertia's blood, and with a shriek she awoke—to find Tertia shaking her, and bidding her get up. It was such a relief to see her sister safe and sound, that Calpurnia embraced her again and again, and then sank back on her pillow, moaning, "Oh, my head! my head!" and sent Tertia for Tryphosa.

When Calpurnia was left alone in the darkened room, with Tertia's favourite kitten curled up on her feet, she thought a great deal about this dream, and especially about that part of it in which the voice had said they would go to Rome. She had heard so much of Rome, and especially of the glories of the Shows, that her heart involuntarily gave a bound of joy at the thought of going there.

It seemed to Calpurnia that a great change had come over her father since Agricola's death. All their lives seemed to have been bound up with Agricola. The family birthdays were a sort of compendium of his career. Caius was born in Aquitania, where also a little sister of Calpurnia saw the light for three days. Calpurnia herself, to her own unspeakable joy, was born in Rome, the year Agricola was Consul, and not long before he was made Governor of Britain. Julius was born at Deva—windy Deva, whose walls look on the misty mountains of the fierce Silures.

Calpurnia's memories of Britain—like most childish memories—were patches of alternate recollection and oblivion. One day stood out sharply from the fogs of mountain and marsh, because that day a horseman came galloping up to the Governor's head-quarters in the Citadel, to say there was a rising of the Ordovices. On another, she remembered seeing a troop of wild, long-haired prisoners, daubed with blue stripes on their breasts and faces, being driven along the street of Deva, the legionaries pricking them up with their spears. Then there were winters with deep snows, when all was white for weeks together, and the snowflakes came down steadily, like swarms of white bees, or eddied about in the wind. Whenever the wind was high of nights, Calpurnia dreamed that she was in Britain.

Very little had happened since they had come to Baiae. Little Tertia's birth and the departure of the boys for Athens were almost the only events. When they first came, the catastrophe of Pompeii and Herculaneum was still recent enough to be talked of a great deal, and Calpurnia had often watched with a beating heart the red sparks which went up from Vesuvius at night.

Since Caius and Aulus went away, Calpurnia had found it rather dull. But for Marcella, it would have been very dull. The girls used to ramble about the gardens and talk for hours, and when they grew tired of the past, there was the inexhaustible subject of the future. What would be the destiny of each? What would each choose, supposing choice were possible? They would choose that Caius and Aulus should come home, of course—but, after that? And then Marcella would make Calpurnia repeat, for the hundredth time, all she could remember of Rome. It was not much—a vision of marble temples, flashing with gold, and of crowds of people always passing and repassing; a tumult of tongues like that in the Grotto, but gay and sunny, and splendid with beautiful horses prancing. People driving in carriages with white and scarlet awnings under avenues of trees, past marble porticos and plashing fountains. It was all mixed up together in Calpurnia's memory, and what she saw most clearly

was a forest of columns rising up into a blue canopy of sky.

Calpurnia lay thinking of all these things, and wishing for Marcella to talk to about them, until her grandmother ooked in to see how she was. Cornelia had brought some slices of dried deer's flesh—the best meat in fever, as the deer never suffers from that malady. Cornelia sat down by her while she ate it.

"You must not tell your mother, Calpurnia," she whispered, "nor must your father know where we went last night. One cannot be too careful, when there are so many ready to misrepresent one's most harmless actions. An old woman and a girl may consult a sorceress unsuspected; but if Lucius Piso did so, it would be said he was aiming at the imperial power."

As Cornelia said this, both she and Calpurnia were thinking all the while of the unhappy Servilia.

"The Gods be my witnesses," said Cornelia, answering the look in Calpurnia's eyes as she lay there without speaking—"the Immortal Gods be my witnesses, that I would never have urged Lucius to lift his finger, if so many who know had not sworn to me that evil was determined against him, as soon as Agricola was dead. Hush! here comes your mother!"

It was not, however, Aemilia, but the faithful Tryphosa—a comely, dark-haired woman, stout, but still young. She came to say that old Marulla, having heard that Calpurnia had a fever, had sent her a charm—a hare's heart and the toe of a horned owl. The charm was in a little bag made of deer's skin, and Tryphosa had promised Marulla to tie it round Calpurnia's neck.

The fever quickly ran its course—so quickly, that Calpurnia was convalescent by the time her father returned from Formiae. He attributed her pale looks and depressed air to physical weakness, but this was not the only cause.

During the many hours that Aemilia sat beside her bed, Calpurnia, by entreaties and caresses, rendered more persuasive by her suffering state, had extracted from her mother all that Aemilia herself knew of what Crassus had said about Aulus Atticus. It was an inexpressible relief to poor Aemilia, weary of all the caution and secrecy which damped the joy of her life, to confide this secret to her daughter's sympathetic ear. Cornelia, as Aemilia knew, had always cherished more ambitious views for Calpurnia, and had hoped that she might marry young Numidius Quadratus, grandson of the Governor of Syria.

In the secret recesses of her virgin heart, as in a garden far withdrawn from view, Calpurnia enter-

tained all sorts of sweet girlish thoughts and fancies. A vision of Aulus was one of these—not of the real Aulus, as he must be by this time, but of the boy Aulus—grown taller, but still a boy, only with a something new, a strange, delightful mystery about him. Calpurnia in these maiden dreams saw him as neither boy nor man, but rather as some celestial visitant, who came treading the common garden paths in the joy of immortal youth, stepping out of the arbutus bushes, and vanishing among them again. A creature in man's form, indeed, but made of finer stuff—one of those Beings, half ethereal, half material, with which the old heathen world peopled the hills and woods and the running streams; Beings whose corporeal part was compounded of no grosser elements than those of which the rustling oaks and the whispering beeches are made. Calpurnia had made him the *Genius loci*. Somewhere in the visible and invisible gardens which he haunted, she had set up his altar. She saw him coming, with steps divinely light, down the long laurel alley, while the Procession of Bacchus stirred and rustled, and seemed to breathe at his approach. He came at high noon—in that hour when all nature pauses, while the horses of the Sun stand still upon the flaming keystone of the arch of heaven. The breeze drops, the birds cease their singing, the stream eddies slow, the lizards lie on the

sunny walls, and even their glittering eyes are still, the trees hold their breath, the honey-bees sleep in the cradling flower-bells, themselves asleep, and all nature slips sweetly into a waking dream.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE ACROPOLIS.

Upon the same day that Demetrius told Piso that the Emperor would surely return in January, the *Centaur* was passing the Cliffs of Aegina, with Salamis and dark Hymettus full in view. Eudoxus had never seen Athens until to-day; but he came of an Athenian stock, and he would rather have been the humblest citizen of Athens than an Emperor of Rome. He was straining his eyes to catch the first sight of Athena's brazen spear flashing from the heights of the Acropolis, and as the *Centaur* sailed on towards Salamis and the Piraeus, the thought of Marathon and Salamis, of Socrates and Plato, and of all the long heroic story of the great Hellenic race, beloved of wise Athena, taught of Apollo and the Muses, so overcame the strong man, that he burst into tears.

"I, too, am of Athenian race," he said to a Greek sailor who was staring at him, and the sailor began

to point out to him the various objects which he ought to observe.

"There rises Lycabettus, behind the Citadel. That's Mount Cithaeron, beyond Salamis, and Corinth is over there, on the other side of the Isthmus," he said.

It was but little past midday, and the sun shone into the southward-opening creeks and bays, and sparkled on the ruffled sea. On the blue waters of the Gulf, the many barques and fishing-boats, the galleys and barges, crossing between the Piraeus and Cenchreae, spread their sails like white-winged birds skimming the wave. The south-west wind filled out their sails, and drove up from the Aegean a long mackerel cloud, mottled like a flock of sheep. Just as they were off Zea, a corn-ship from Alexandria passed them, plunging heavily over the crested billows, her huge, square sails flapping noisily in the strengthening breeze, her masts and yards groaning, her cordage creaking and straining. She was painted a deep red, with an eye under her prow, which terminated in a goose's head, and made her seem like some gigantic bird breasting the waves. Her sails were striped blue and orange, laced with a lattice-work of ropes—the better to resist the rending blasts of Euroclydon. She passed so close to the *Centaur*, that Eudoxus could distinctly see the copper-red faces of her

Egyptian sailors, the flute-player standing by the mainmast playing on the flute, and an old man of tall and commanding presence, with long white hair and beard, clad in linen garments of Asiatic form, leaning against the high railing of the bulwark. Eudoxus caught his glance, and thought he would know that emaciated face and those piercing eyes wherever he might see them.

The *Centaur* was soon safely through the narrow entrance, past the moles, and in smooth water. In a moment, the sea seemed lost, and Eudoxus felt as if he were already on land, so closely did the town of Piraeus press upon the wharves and landing-places. As the town itself stood on higher ground, the temples and porticos were all seen from the ship in a nearness strange to mariners who had been fifteen days at sea.

No sooner was the *Centaur* alongside the wharf than she was surrounded and boarded by a swarm of long-shoremen. Touters bawled recommendations of their respective Inns; while a barber's boy plucked Eudoxus by the cloak, and offered to take him where he could get his hair and beard trimmed before he went up to the City. Hawkers were crying all sorts of refreshments, the most tempting to mariners being fresh figs, which were offered for sale by boys. Groups of merchants, eagerly talking together, were beginning to move towards the wharf from the Long

Portico, and a number of persons, who, by their garb and their sober countenances, seemed to be philosophers, were hurrying in evident excitement to the place where the corn-ship was coming in. Eudoxus with some difficulty succeeded in shaking off the donkey-men—who expatiated upon the length and steepness of the road—and, selecting one out of about a hundred candidates for the honour of carrying his effects up to the City, his choice fell upon a sharp lad, who in a trice had slung over his shoulders the two goat-skin bags which contained Eudoxus's *impedimenta*, and set off briskly up the Thesean Way. Eudoxus, as he passed a small temple bearing the emblems of Poseidon, stepped in to offer thanks for his safe voyage; while the boy sat down outside and waited for him.

Eudoxus made but a brief prayer; but when he came out, the passengers on board the corn-ship were already stepping ashore. The old man whose appearance had so much impressed Eudoxus had landed, and was receiving the respectful greetings of the party of philosophers.

"Who is it that they are greeting with such delight?" he asked of his attendant.

"Who? Why, the Great Apollonius—he of Tyana," said the boy. "He's the wisest man alive—a second Socrates. He foretold the Plague at Ephesus, and

he knows all about a man as soon as he looks at him. All the philosophers—or nearly all of 'em—have come down to receive him; they've been watching the ships come in these three days."

Eudoxus now observed that a great many young men, who looked like students, made part of the crowd gathered round Apollonius, and for a moment he thought of mingling with it himself, to see if Aulus and Caius were there. But the next moment he reflected that this would give an unnecessary publicity to his own arrival. So, bidding the boy step out, he began to ascend the long five miles of the street which led from the Piraeus to the City.

Every step which Eudoxus took awakened some memory of his country's story; but the sight of Apollonius had strangely changed the current of his thoughts—reminding him of the ties which bound him to his country's conquerors. The love and admiration which Eudoxus bore to his illustrious Patron—who, as uniting the characters of soldier and philosopher, appealed to all his Greek instincts—was so strong that it had power to occupy him even as he approached the Sacred City of his fathers. All the dangers, known and suspected, which threatened Piso thronged into his recollection, and brought with them a great impatience to see for himself that all was well with Caius and Aulus.

"The walls used to be higher than the houses," said his guide, who was evidently used to play the Cicerone. "In the Plague, they say the street was choked up with dead bodies. Where do you want to go?"

"To the house of Aristarchus, the brass-worker, in the Ceramicus," replied Eudoxus.

"Oh yes; I know him. A very good sort of fellow. Lives in the Inner Ceramicus, on the left hand, under the Colonnade, as you go to the Gate. Sells jewels too. A great Roman nobleman bought a cameo of him a little while ago—a very rich man, they say—a friend of Caesar's. I've never seen an Emperor myself; but my grandfather saw Nero, and heard him sing—voice as hoarse as a crow, but of course they had to applaud."

When they had passed the Peiraic Gate—where the Roman legionaries stood on guard—and were in the City proper, Eudoxus' guide became more voluble than before.

"That is the Pompeion," he said, pointing to a large building close to the Gate. "That's where they keep the things for the Processions—of course, you've never seen the Panathenaea, when they carry the Peplum up to Athena's Temple? What a pity! You come just a year too late—it's only once in four years, you know. By Zeus! that *is* a procession!

But you can see what it's like, for it's all carved on the Parthenon. But what's that to seeing the Procession itself? There's the Temple of Demeter—and that's Poseidon hurling his spear at Polybotes—and that's Photion's house, where Alcibiades profaned the Mysteries. Have they got such a fine street as this in Rome? Wait till you see the Ceramicus. There's a street, if you will! I don't believe there's one to beat that in Rome."

He delayed Eudoxus so long, pointing out all the bronze figures of Gods and men which stood out so nobly against the fair white marble of the Colonnade, that before they reached the Agora, the philosophers overtook them, Apollonius walking in the midst, and a crowd of idlers following. As Eudoxus stood aside to make way, Apollonius stopped, and beckoned to him to approach.

"You are the servant of Lucius Piso," he said, in a voice too low to be overheard. "Do you bring any news from Rome?"

"None that you do not already know, illustrious Sir," replied Eudoxus, struck with amazement and dismay at this recognition.

The philosopher perceived it. "Fear nothing," he said. "I am a friend to Piso, and to all good men. Bid him beware of Calpurnius Crassus. And do you beware of what you say to any man in Athens." And

then he added louder, "At the house of Aristarchus, then. Farewell," and passed on, leaving Eudoxus confounded at finding even his destination known to a man just come from Alexandria, and before that from Ephesus.

By the time Eudoxus had reached the point where the Peiraic street emerged into the Agora, the sun had already sunk low on the mountains of Argolis and Arcadia, and the temple-crowned rock of the Acropolis was transfigured into the likeness of a city built of the clouds of heaven. Of no more substantial stuff seemed the columns of the Propylaea or the steps of the great stairway, which, growing more and more translucent as they ascended, glowed at last like molten gold—golden stairs going up to the Golden City of the Gods. Above the outspread wings of the great gateway of the Propylaea, rose the shining roofs of the Parthenon and the Erectheion, and above them both, Athena, Fighter in the Front of Battle, held aloft her brazen spear. The dazzling whiteness of the marbles, and the brilliant blues and reds which relieved it, and lent emphasis to the subtle delicacy of the Doric line, blended together in a rainbow-glory—so unearthly, so phantom-like, that Eudoxus held his breath, lest the vision should dissolve into the pure ether out of which it seemed to have been created. The rose-red splendours grew

more vivid, yet less and less earthly, as he gazed, and spread over the sky, till all heaven and earth were transfigured, and the great statue of Athena—cast from the spoils of Marathon—glowed like molten brass.

The vision had begun to change, and a purple greyness was creeping up the golden stairs; but still Eudoxus stood in the Agora, hearing afar off the buzz of voices, the noises of the market-place, but seeing only the Sacred Citadel of the City of the Violet Crown—the centre of the whole earth—fallen from her high estate, ravaged, despoiled, by friend and foe, Greek and Roman, but the wonder of the world for ever. The guide recalled him to the present.

"Those statues of men on horseback, on the left of the stairs, are Augustus and Agrippa," he said. "But you have never once cast your eye round the Agora—that's the King's Porch, with Theseus on the top, throwing Sciron into the sea—and that's the Painted Porch. Are you a Stoic?"

"I am," replied Eudoxus, somewhat surprised at the question.

"Then I'll take you in and show you the pictures of Theseus and the Amazons," said his obliging companion. "It's all on our way. Just look at the people—you could walk on their heads! Have you got as many people as that in Rome?"

But Eudoxus did not hear him. He had mounted high enough on the great staircase to see the plain, and the harbour, the isles, and the mountains of Argolis beyond, and Hymettus, violet against the south-eastern sky. The splendour was already fading —the rosy glories giving way to purples and violets; but the waters of the Gulf gleamed like pale gold, and the summit of the Acropolis was still tipped with fire. Eudoxus was hastening up the stairs, that he might enjoy the full extent of that stupendous view, when he saw two young men come out from one of the side-gates of the Propylaea. In the same instant, he perceived that they saw him, and that they started like persons surprised, and then came leaping down the steps towards him.

"Eudoxus! Eudoxus! What is the matter? Why have you come?" cried the taller of the two, as he reached Eudoxus.

"All is well," said Eudoxus. And then they both threw their arms round his neck, and embraced him, and, recovering from the fears which his unexpected appearance had aroused, began to ask him a hundred questions. How had he come? Why had he come? How had he found his way here?

"Can you ask, Aulus?" said Caius Piso, smiling. "Need any stranger in Athens ask his way to the Acropolis?" Then he laid his hand affectionately

on Eudoxus's shoulder, and said, "This is Athens, Eudoxus. Ah, Eudoxus, you Greeks are our masters, after all!" He was pointing to the city which lay beneath them—a sea of houses breaking high on the slopes of the hills.

The three sat down—Eudoxus in the middle—and watched the slow coming on of twilight, and the gathering of the mists in the plain—while Eudoxus's porter, as soon as he saw that his hirer had met with friends, did not give himself the trouble to go any farther, but established himself and his burden comfortably at the foot of the stairs, and there waited, beguiling the time by a calculation as to how many oboli this delay ought to be good for.

"As no one can overhear us up here, Eudoxus," said Aulus, "pray tell us as quickly as you can all that you know we would ask—and first, how are Piso and my dear mother?"

While Eudoxus was answering these questions, he himself was observing the young men with the utmost interest. They had been two years at Athens, and at their age, two years bring great changes in both appearance and character. Aulus looked, as he was, the elder, and was grown even taller than he had promised. He had indeed the form and figure of a young athlete, and his frank open countenance seemed to Eudoxus to be like that of the young hunter

Meleager. His expression was one of cheerful resolve. His fair complexion and yellow-brown hair, clustering close round his head, completed his resemblance to a Greek rather than a Roman type.

Caius, a slighter, more boyish figure, had a very thoughtful countenance, in which Eudoxus fancied he could trace both the gravity of Piso and the gentleness of Aemilia. His dark-brown hair, thick but uncurled, hung rather carelessly round his head. His face was somewhat long, his chin pointed, and his whole expression suggested a reflective rather than an energetic temperament. It was indeed evident that in practical matters Atticus took the lead.

With the warning of Apollonius still ringing in his ears, Eudoxus observed great caution in all he said. He had already compared the young men in his own mind, and come to the conclusion that Atticus was the more efficient counsellor and the keener observer of the two, and he resolved to find an opportunity of seeing him alone, and confiding to him first those warning words of Apollonius. Meanwhile, he remarked, as unconcernedly as he could, that it would be well—for certain reasons he would hereafter mention—to be very cautious as to what they talked about, except when sure of being alone. Public affairs, for instance, were better not discussed before

strangers. Aulus looked at Eudoxus with such a quick and full comprehension of his meaning in his eyes, that Eudoxus's heart sank. Did even Aulus, then, know that there was danger in the air? But Caius only said he did not care enough about public affairs to talk about them—while Caesar kept his father out of office in this way at Baiae, he felt no interest in the petty barbarous wars which seemed to be all that was going on. Indeed, ever since dear old Agricola died, he had felt too disgusted to talk about anything, and had tried to console himself with philosophy.

CHAPTER XXI.

BAIAE IN THE SEASON.

The mild winter of Campania is no more like winter as we know him, than the lion who, for love of a maid, submitted to have his eye-teeth drawn and his claws cut, is like the King of the Forest. In Campania, winter leaves half the trees still clothed, and only tones down the glare of summer into a dusty grey-greenness. The continued absence of the Emperor from Italy kept those visitors at Baiae who usually felt it their duty—or their privilege, as the case might be—to be in Rome, and a great number of visitors always remained at Baiae until the rising of Aquarius assured them that winter was past. Baiae was therefore gayer than ever, the Porticos and Baths more crowded, the talk louder in the public libraries, and the streets gayer with litters and chairs. Day after day, troops of spangled ladies and perfumed gentlemen made morning calls at Piso's Villa. Their object was two-fold—to be able to talk with their

other friends about the Pisos and to angle for invitations to supper. The Pisos were great people, of ancient lineage and princely fortune, and they were in exactly that degree of disgrace at Court which made other people extremely curious about them. Though no one in particular had ever said so—plainly—yet there was a general impression that many people *thought* there *might* be a turn in the tide of Piso's fortune. Caesar—the Gods preserve him!—had had a bad illness, since which, poor man, he had quite lost his handsome figure—his legs having wasted dreadfully, while his stomach had swollen in a manner which must be very bad for him. To be sure, he kept up his exercises—practised everyday at a mark, and all that—but still—Titus, we know, was unhappily snatched from an adoring people at a year or two less than Domitian's age. This Sarmatian expedition was a great risk. We ought to face it. And if anything *should* happen—why then, quite between ourselves, you know—poor dear Flavius Clemens had not the energy, you know—the Flavian energy—remarkable family, the Flavii—like their own old oak at Reate! Very odd that the son and grandsons of a common Sabine farmer should come to be masters of the world! But, really—one must own it—Clemens is so *very* quiet and indolent, you know. Rome wants a *Master*. Then, what *are* these

queer things they say of him? There's *something* in them, depend on it—where there's smoke there's fire. Oh! excellent man, so far as that goes—as harmless as Nerva himself—and, between ourselves, just about as fit to govern Rome. Capital joke that about the imperial nativity! Poor old Nerva, of all men in the world, to have an imperial nativity! Depend on it, those clever scoundrels the astrologers never set *that* story afloat—a joke of Domitian's own invention, of course! Self-evident—who else would ever have thought of it? Of course—Caesar was poking fun at him. Why, no one ever said that Piso himself had an imperial nativity. No one went as far as *that*—luckily for our friend Piso.

The gilded frequenters of the Baths did not speak so plainly as this to Piso; but he read their thoughts—and civilly invited them to supper, when the assiduity of their attentions began to fairly put him to shame. They came—resplendent in the latest mode for robe and hair, and praised the taste of his banqueting-room, and declared that no one but Myron *could* have made his silver sideboard—the one with the death of Actaeon—divine, perfectly divine! Piso was a courtly host, and took all these compliments graciously, and listened politely to his guests' conversation.

Although it was chiefly at the entreaty of Aemilia

that he gave these entertainments, she found it far harder to perform her part on those occasions when ladies were invited. The ladies who frequented Baiae were very advanced in their opinions. Their talk was of the Shows—of favourite gladiators, of the respective merits of combats between men, beasts, and beasts and men; of the latest fashions in hair, and of the latest scandal. Fulvia, the wife of Balbus the Aedile, had a passionate preference for Priscus over Verus, based on the delightful curve which Priscus described in the air with his weapon before he delivered his blow. Aemilia—who, it will be remembered, was not a Roman—had a foolish repugnance to seeing blood flow—even the blood of beasts. Her dislike really was, as Fulvia told her, quite unnatural. What were wild beasts for, if not for the arena? Upon the whole, Fulvia herself inclined to prefer a combat of a man with a beast to any other—there was, she thought, more variety in it. And then, both man and beast were sure to be in earnest—whereas, dangerous as it was thus to trifle with the spectators, gladiators did sometimes agree to spare one another. Now, with a wild beast, there is none of this—you can be sure at least of fair play—a real life-and-death encounter. And, for her part, Fulvia did not care to see any other.

Fulvia was one of the most popular and admired

ladies at Baiae; but, incredible as it may appear, Aemilia did not like her—women have these foolish dislikes, which men never can understand. Aemilia could not even conceal her dislike, and stab Fulvia invisibly behind a smile. Fulvia, on her part, used to make fun of Aemilia, and call her Portia, and Lucretia, and other opprobrious names, after an encounter of wits which took place between them some little time after the visit of Crassus. Fulvia had been talking about Sergius the gladiator, declaring that he was a delicious creature, and that his warts in particular were perfectly fascinating. The only complaint she had to make was that Hippia had taken him away from Rome. It really was rather hard of Caesar to be so strict—especially as he had had his own little fling. Did not Aemilia think these divorce laws just a trifle severe?

"I think, Fulvia," replied Aemilia, as she saw all the company waiting breathless for her reply, "I think that the laws you refer to are among the very best laws made by any Prince since the Divine Augustus, and I only regret that they are not enforced."

"Really? Well, to be sure, they would not affect *you*," retorted Fulvia, with unmistakeable insolence. "Some women are placed so entirely out of the way of temptation."

Fulvia shook out the folds of her too-closely clinging silken robe as she spoke, and glanced round at the company with a look which said, "Our good Aemilia here, for instance, is not fascinating enough to be tempted."

"But I did not know you were so devoted to Caesar, my dear Aemilia," she continued. "How much you have been misjudged! I'm very devoted too—such a handsome man, and such a wonderful shot—never misses his ostrich with those sweet crescent-barbed arrows. Ah, you poor thing, you've never seen him! But I shall always say he is a *little* too strait-laced for *me*. And now we positively *must* be going. I heard the fourth hour called I know not *how* long ago! Cotilus, have you got my sweet Micipsa?"

Cotilus, a languid young man, with curled locks, and attired in the extreme of fashion, who usually followed in Fulvia's train, held up a little marmozet, which he had been teazing, and which seemed to have just bitten his finger.

"Sweet pet!" said Fulvia. "Do, I beg of you, Cotilus, be more careful of him—there, you've made him bite you. I'm sure you've been hurting him, poor darling."

"I only prevented him from pulling Tertia's cat's tail, Fulvia," said the injured Cotilus. Tertia's Persian kitten was to be seen in the corner, with erect fur.

"The darling can't endure cats," observed Fulvia. "And now, my dearest Aemilia, I really *must* tear myself away!"

It was a good many days after this that Piso, going into Baiae upon some business or other, met Cotilus in the Forum. He was walking with an elderly man, who had his arm in lover-like fashion round the neck of a very handsome boy. As he walked, he played with the boy's long and beautiful hair.

"Hail, Piso!" said Cotilus. "Permit me to make known to you my friend Afer, who arrived but yesterday from Rome."

Piso acknowledged both the salutation and the introduction very coldly, and with a civil excuse was passing on. But Cotilus detained him. "Have you heard the glorious news?" he said. "Afer brought the first rumour of it; but another post has come in since then—there's the public crier putting up the bulletin with the latest news. It's quite certain——"

"What *is* the news?" asked Piso.

"Why the very best that could be!" cried Cotilus, in well-feigned rapture, watching Piso's face narrowly. "Caesar returns in January!"

"Then the war is ended?" said Piso. "Has there been a battle, or have the Sarmatians submitted?"

"Oh, a victory, I believe," returned Cotilus. "Our friend Afer here says that the despatches were bound

with laurel—Regulus the Senator told him. Regulus was in the Senate when the letters arrived. We shall have grand doings this spring—a Triumph, I hope. You were in Britain, I think, Piso, at the time of the Dacian Triumph?"

"I was," replied Piso; "but I saw the Judaean. I must pray you to excuse me, Cotilus. I am already late; I have an appointment."

"He took it very coolly," said Cotilus to his companion, as he watched Piso continuing his way. "Could he have heard the news before? Or is he really as much absorbed in his farming as he pretends to be?"

"That allusion to the Judaean Triumph was very indiscreet," observed Afer. "Piso must know that Caesar considers the divine Titus took the lion's share of the credit of everything that happened in their father's reign. Does Piso always go about unattended, Cotilus? To my mind, there is an ostentation of simplicity—if not a tacit reproach to Caesar—in his doing so. Parthenius and Sigerius will have it that Piso is a very astute fellow; and, for my part, I make it a rule always to suspect a man who is as irreproachable as he is."

CHAPTER XXII.

RECALL.

The Saturnalia were over, the New Year was come in. The calves had been offered, and the victims slain, for the Feast of the Paganalia. The first day of spring had come, according to the Calendar, and in Campania the winter was past.

Baiae was almost deserted. Every one who was, or who desired to seem, of consequence, had hurried up to Rome to receive Domitian, when all the city went out to meet him, in white garments and wreaths of victory. The victory would not bear much looking into; but what mattered that? It took place a long way off. Rome had been most abominably dull during Caesar's absence; and now Stella the Poet was going to give Games in honour of Caesar's conquest. The streets, which had been half empty, were crowded once more. Strangers from all parts of the Empire—that is, from all parts of the civilised world—jostled each other in the Forum and along the

Suburra—the hawk-eyed Arabian, the silken and perfumed Cilician, the sinewy Thracian—Greeks, Egyptians, Asiatics, Aethiopians, and more distant strangers still, mingled with the Roman legionaries returned from beyond the Danube, and with Senators and Knights of Rome, and lesser magnates of the Italian cities. The sound of hammer and saw was going all day—night and day, as the time drew near—in the Flavian Amphitheatre, the Great Circus and the New Circus, in all of which the Shows were to be held. Domitian, with a modesty on which the poets were sitting up all night to write epigrams, had declined a Triumph, and only offered a laurel crown to Capitoline Jove. Indeed, he was so modest, that it was Stella the Poet who was going to exhibit the Games.

Calpurnia of course heard of all this, and for some days every other thought of her heart was forgotten in longing to see the spectacle shortly to be displayed before the eyes of Rome. Her friend Marcella was already there—the Duumvir Marcellus was gone to Rome on the business of the New Road—to be called the Domitian Way—from Cumae to Puteoli. Calpurnia had received a letter, with a description of the reception which Rome gave her returning lord. Marcella had not been able to describe it very fully; but she had succeeded in conveying an impression of

crowds of shouting people, prancing horses, banners, trumpets, clouds of dust, gleaming spears, laurel crowns, chariots and litters—and, in the midst of it all, Caesar himself, "terrible of countenance, and like an emperor," wrote little Marcella. Her artless and somewhat confused account fired Calpurnia's fancy. She had never quite realized before what banishment meant. To be denied the sight of all this pomp, and, worst of all, not to see the Shows, seemed to Calpurnia a hardship almost too great to be borne. Her father himself appeared to feel it—he was become very silent, and seldom smiled. One morning, Calpurnia found him standing on the terrace, looking out over the sea, which grew bluer every day.

"Dear father," she said, nestling up to him, as he stroked her golden hair, "do you not think, if you asked him, that Caesar would let us see the Shows?"

Piso smiled, but very sadly. "Poor little Calpurnia," he said—"So you want to see them? Well, it is natural, with every one talking of them, as if we were only born for this—to see the Shows."

"Do *you* not love them, father?" asked Calpurnia, opening her eyes wide in astonishment.

"I, my child?" replied Piso, taking her face in his hand. "They are not real enough for me."

"Why, Father, sometimes they kill each other, don't they?"

"And does my little Calpurnia want to see men kill each other?" said Piso, with a kind, yet reproachful smile.

"Oh no! I should shut my eyes, if I thought they really would kill each other," said Calpurnia. "But they often don't—Marcella says. And I do so want to see the beasts—the lions, and tigers, and elephants. Oh! I wonder if I ever shall!"

"My dear little girl," began Piso; but the Stoic homily which he intended to deliver was interrupted by a visit from Silius Italicus, who had thought it worth while to drive over from Puteoli on purpose to tell Piso that he had that morning heard that Apollonius of Tyana had landed three days ago from a Corinthian ship, and gone on at once to Rome.

"I thank you for giving me the pleasure of a visit from you, Silius," said Piso; "but how does the coming of Apollonius concern me?"

"In no way, Piso, except that Demetrius foretold to you that Caesar would send for him," replied Silius. "Now, I heard three days since, on excellent authority, that Caesar *has* sent for him. But he had anticipated Caesar's commands, and was already on his way."

"For a learned man, and a philosopher, my dear Silius," said Piso, smiling, "I must say you have a

truly marvellous faculty for ascribing profound motives to persons who have, in all probability, acted from very simple ones. Is it so extraordinary that a Greek of Ephesus—even were he not also a philosopher—should go to Rome?"

"You have reason on your side, Piso; but I can only say that some inner voice assures me that this visit of Apollonius has a meaning. I am as sure that Apollonius is in a plot of some sort, as that I am standing here." Silius said these words in a low voice, and added, in the same tone, "I am myself under obligations to Caesar. He has never wronged *me;* but has, on the contrary, shown me much kindness. It is for you, Piso, that I chiefly fear. I know nothing; but I see all the straws drifting one way, and I ask myself what wind it is which blows them? Mark well your cousin Calpurnius Crassus, Piso—his hand it is, I verily believe, which pulls all these secret strings."

"Man is certainly the most wretched of all animals, Silius," said Piso. "He knows beforehand what shall befall him, and dies a thousand deaths, where they only die one. What is our life? And what are we? The soul of a God, chained to the body of a beast—too great and too little ever to be blest!"

"Come, come, Piso!" said Silius, cheerfully. "You are suffering from a fit of melancholy—many

men are subject to it in the spring of the year. I myself have had it; but I thank the Gods, as I grow older, I become more even in my spirits. At your age, the divine Julius was but the equal of Creticus, Crassus, Lucullus, or Domitius—nay, scarcely their equal, inasmuch as his wealth was less than theirs."

"And what then, Silius?" replied Piso. "Think you the great Julius was happy when he had triumphed five times? Xerxes wept as he looked upon his uncounted hosts, and considered that, even though they should be victorious that day over the Greeks, yet very soon they must all yield to death, the only conqueror of all men. And Alexander wept because, forsooth, he had finished conquering the world—not knowing that his empire, and many other nations whose names he never heard, should fall under our mightier hand. Truly, Silius, the whole race of man is a Sisyphus, condemned to fail for ever at the moment of attainment."

"And yet, Piso, what joys he tastes on the way," replied Italicus. "There is a pleasure in effort itself, apart from success. The Epicureans have been compelled to admit it."

"As children find a delight in playing at battles and triumphs," said Piso. "Lucretius is right—there is no highest, no middle, no lowest; but only ever-

lasting motion, in search of everlasting rest—never to be reached. The forces of Nature—

> "'Move to make, and to dissolve things made.'

As in the Lampadedromia, we—

> "'Like racers, bear the lamp of life and live;
> And our race done, our lamp to others give.'

Our aspirations, Silius, make life intolerable; and yet life is intolerable without them. Who ever desired fame more ardently than Lucretius himself? It sometimes seems to me, Silius, that the good of a man consists chiefly in his enduring infinite pain, and that only in the sharpest pain can he find any exquisite delight."

"There speaks the Academy rather than the Garden, Piso," said Silius, "and the Porch rather than either. But indeed it appears to me, Piso, that both Epicureans and Stoics err alike in this—that each of them ignores a good half of human nature. I have often heard you say that a man of taste can hardly find a place among the Stoics; but what sort of art, I ask you, would Epicurus leave us? All the loftier conceptions of the poets and artists must be condemned—some for meddling with things we cannot comprehend, and the others for exciting emotions of terror and horror, unbefitting a philosophy whose aim is ease."

"That is the very question," said Piso, quickly.

"For my part, I am inclined to believe that Epicurus himself intended to teach that not ease, but ease after pain, is the *summum bonum;* and, if so, his wise man might consistently encounter the greatest suffering for the sake of the happiness to follow. Thus, he does not really differ from the Academy, to whose large and genial teaching on morals I incline most of all."

In such talk as this, the day wore on, until it was time for the bath and for supper, to which Piso persuaded his friend to stay. Silius had much to tell of Vergil's Villa, of which he had long since completed the purchase. He was in the midst of explaining to the ladies the pains he had taken to discover what had been the arrangement of the library in Vergil's time, when Nicomachus, the house-steward, an elderly man of very venerable appearance, entered the supper-room, and, coming to the back of the couch on which Piso reclined above Silius, whispered something in his master's ear. Silius, who only heard Nicomachus say, "Sir, there is some one in the atrium," supposed it was a matter of business, admired Piso's prompt attention to it, and went on descanting to Cornelia and Aemilia on Tyrian dyes and Vergil's curtains.

Piso had risen to obey the summons without any change of colour. But as soon as he had left the supper-room, and gone a few steps along the hall

which lay between it and the atrium, he asked in a whisper—

"Who is it?"

"A Tribune, sir, of the Praetorian Guard, come post from Rome," replied Nicomachus, and added, in his master's ear, "and he has a century of horse with him—they are drawn up in front of the portico."

Piso quickened his steps; then checked himself, and walked on at his usual pace. Nicomachus, following close behind, remarked the dignified quietness of his bearing. As they came into the atrium, a group of the upper servants, who had collected near the entrance, respectfully drew back. Nicomachus halted on the threshold, and Piso entered the atrium alone. The lamps were already lighted; but it was not yet dark. Both the inner and outer doors stood wide open, and the cold night-air made the lamps flicker. In the midst of the atrium, close by the altar of the Penates, on which, as Piso even in that moment observed, his shadow fell, stood the Tribune. The lamplight, feebly contending with the failing daylight, flickered on his polished armour. Through the open doors behind him, came a faint clash of steel, as a horse champed his bit.

"What is your business with me?" asked Piso of the Tribune, a large and powerfully-built man, of a swarthy countenance.

"I am Aelianus Casperinus, a Tribune of the Praetorians," he replied, "and I bring you a letter from our Lord God the Emperor Caesar Domitian, which will make known to you wherefore I am come."

So saying, he gave Piso a small packet tied with thread, and sealed with a large seal.

"Have you a knife, Nicomachus?" asked Piso; and Nicomachus, hastening forward, cut the string with so trembling a hand that he also cut the paper. "Go and tell the ladies, and beg them to be tranquil," whispered Piso, and Nicomachus left the atrium to obey.

The Tribune meanwhile stood immovable, making no sign of either respect or the contrary, but seeming to be only the passive instrument of him who had sent him. Piso had stepped aside to read the letter —ostensibly to obtain a better light—out of the draught from the open doors.

After the usual superscription, the Emperor, addressing Piso as his dear Lucius Calpurnius, affected to chide him gently for his long absence from Rome, and professed to have sought him vainly among those who came out to greet him on his return from Sarmatia, where Minerva had shown herself so favourable to the Roman arms. "Let me see you, my dear Piso, without delay," he continued. "You must positively be a spectator of the Games which

our excellent Stella is about to exhibit in my honour. I send you this by the hand of Casperius, who has my orders to take with him a sufficient number of the Guard to form an escort befitting your rank. You see how I love you! Your venerable mother, and the amiable Aemilia, with your children, will of course accompany you. Farewell."

As soon as Piso had read the letter, he turned to Casperius. "We are but lately sat down to supper," he said. "You will honour us? I fear the water will be cold in the bath; but it shall be heated at once. Your men too, with their horses, will require some refreshment before they retire to rest. Nicomachus, see that the rooms on the north side are prepared."

"I thankfully accept your supper, Piso, for myself, my men, and my horses," replied Casperius, more politely than he had yet spoken. "I will not bathe. Nor must we delay till morning. My orders were that we should start to-night. Caesar was graciously pleased to observe that your servants and baggage could follow you. I heard him also command Parthenius the Chamberlain to send word to the servants in charge of your house to make it ready instantly."

"Then permit me to conduct you to the supper-room," said Piso.

Meanwhile Nicomachus, returning to the supper-

room, thought he would best fulfil his master's wish by delivering his news before Silius, whose presence would check too great freedom of speech. As soon as he said, "A messenger from Caesar," both Cornelia and Aemilia turned deadly pale, and Calpurnia sprang from her seat, fearing her mother was about to swoon. But Aemilia strove hard to master her terror, and asked, in a trembling voice, who had brought the message.

"A Tribune, with a hundred men," replied the steward; "but, my dear mistress, my master desired me to say he bids you be tranquil."

"Aemilia, be calm! Remember that agitation looks like guilt," whispered Cornelia, grasping Aemilia's shoulder, until the pain a little recalled her from her terror.

Silius, not attempting to hide his concern, hurriedly exhorted them all to fear nothing—probably Piso was to be recalled, as every one had been expecting he would be.

Before any of them had time to recover themselves, footsteps were heard approaching, the curtain was drawn aside, and Piso and Casperius appeared in the doorway.

"You know the illustrious Silius Italicus," said Piso, holding aside the curtain, that Casperius might enter before him. "My dear mother, my dear

Aemilia, this is the Tribune Casperius, who brings us Caesar's gracious commands to return to Rome, that we may be present at the Games shortly to be given for the Sarmatian victories."

Piso spoke so calmly and cheerfully that Calpurnia thought there could be nothing to fear. Silius, rising from his couch as quickly as his age and infirmities permitted him, embraced Piso, and congratulated him on this mark of Caesar's favour, and Casperius took the place which Silius insisted on giving up to him, amidst expressions of nothing but pleasure and gratitude. Even Cornelia began to question Casperius about the reception of the Emperor and the preparations for the Games, as though she had not a thought beyond the gaieties of Rome; while Aemilia, with a stony calmness which surprised her husband, courteously excused herself, and went away to prepare for the journey.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALTAE MOENIA ROMAE.

While the hurried preparations were being made, Piso took Silius into the library. His eye fell on his "Lucretius"—a splendid copy, gorgeous in saffron and vermilion. "It's outward appearance matches your 'Vergil,'" he said. "Will you accept it in memory of our friendship? Nay—I wish you to have it. Keep it for my sake; but do not thank me. I think I have done with Lucretius."

Piso said this with a curious smile, his hand resting on the volumes, as though he were taking his farewell of them.

"You seem to me, Piso, to expect good fortune," said Silius, looking at him with friendly anxiety. "No one would rejoice more than I; but the roads are slippery in Rome—and falls are dangerous."

"I understand you, my dear Italicus," replied Piso, pressing his hand. "If Lucretius has taught me nothing else, he has at least taught me the

hollowness of fame. And, as for dangers—a little sooner, or a little later, must not we all die?"

"Yes, Piso; but——"

"My dear Italicus," said Piso, with the same steadfast cheerfulness; "if I were going to battle, would you bid me go with a sorrowful countenance? Would, indeed, it were to battle—for then I need not take with me those for whose sakes I am sometimes little better than a coward! Let us pour out a libation, Silius, to my household Gods." As he spoke, Piso filled a goblet from a jar which stood upon the floor, and, covering his head with the lappet of his toga, he went into the atrium, followed by Italicus, and, standing before the altar of the Penates, poured out the wine. As he did so, a horse neighed outside, and Italicus noticed that two of the Praetorians stood on guard in the entrance-hall—watched by the great hound, who in the dim light, looked like a crouching lion.

The panic which had at first seized the household when it became known that a band of Praetorians had come to fetch Piso to Rome, quickly gave way to joy as the news spread that Caesar had sent for him in all this haste merely that he might see the Shows, and that the soldiers were a guard of honour. From this point of view, the departure took rather a festal character—or would have done so, had there been

time to think about it. But Casperius urged the Emperor's orders; the day fixed for the Shows was near at hand, and not an hour was to be lost. So urgent was Casperius, that by the third hour of the night the cavalcade was in motion—the guards so disposed as completely to surround the carriages, Casperius himself riding close to the wheel of that in which was Piso, with Cornelia, Aemilia, and Calpurnia.

The heavy-wheeled carriage lumbered along the Domitian Way, and after Cumae was past, Aquarius shone on the left, and the night-wind blew in cold from the sea. Piso had ample time to take counsel with himself. He had often looked forward to this hour, and now it had come. He had expected something more terrible. This seeming friendly recall somewhat unnerved him—he knew Domitian, and knew that his smile was still more to be feared than his frown. But for himself, Piso hailed any change from the dull monotony of his banishment. And he well knew that never for one moment had he been removed from observation. That he might be tempted to imprudence, that he might become a rallying-point for the disaffected—this had been Domitian's motive for keeping him at Baiae.

While Piso, revolving hopes and fears, counted the miles as they were left behind, his mother, leaning

back with closed eyes, resolutely set her mind neither to hope nor fear. That haughty daughter of the Scipios would have offered her throat to the executioner's sword with the same unshaken fortitude with which this night she had suppressed all signs of fear.

To Calpurnia it seemed incredible that every one could take all this so calmly. She was herself dazed with excitement. Whenever she fell into a doze, gladiators and wild beasts danced before her, and the rumble of the wheels was the roar of the streets of Rome. She had resolved to keep awake all the way. She had held the curtain a little aside—just wide enough to see where they were going. At first, the way led up to Cumae—Calpurnia recognized the very place where the wayfarer had startled the horses the night they went to Dama's Villa—she shivered as she thought of it. Then under the Temple of Apollo, and through the town. A light or two moved in an upper window as they passed, but Cumae was half-deserted, and the hollow clatter of the horses' hoofs over the Forum sounded to Calpurnia like echoes in a tomb. And so they passed out at the Northern Gate, beyond which the pyramids and columns and mausolea of the ancient Necropolis rose up white and ghostly. And as they turned northward the wind from the sea blew more cold, the

mists lay thick over the marsh, the tramp of the horses sounded dull on the damp, tufa-flagged road, and Calpurnia fell asleep.

She was awakened by lights flashing in her eyes, and, looking out of the carriage, she found that they were in the courtyard of the Inn outside the gate of Liternum, changing horses. The ostlers, roused out of their first sleep, went stumbling about with lanterns and torches, falling over the tubs and rakes, and making twice as much noise as was necessary. An old woman, with a red kerchief tied round her head, was holding a lamp out of an upper window and screeching to those below to take care they did not set the straw afire, and poor little Tertia—who had just awakened to find herself in Tryphosa's arms, instead of her own bed, was bursting into terrified sobs and tears.

Piso, who was walking up and down in front of the stable, took Tertia from Tryphosa, and carried her about till she fell asleep again on his shoulder. All around stood the great cavalry horses—some drinking from the buckets the ostlers held for them, some with their heads in the hay-racks, stamping their hoofs and switching their tails, the steam from their bodies filling the yard with smoke. The soldiers were calling for a *posca*, and when it came they dipped their bread in it, and some of them gave

slices to their horses. And all the while Casperius was hurrying the ostlers to change the carriage-horses —for they must be at Sinuessa by morning.

Then they were off again, through the sleeping town, past Scipio's Tomb and the Dragon's Cave, and down the hill; and Calpurnia, leaning back in the deep-cushioned corner of the carriage, slept soundly, and only woke up as they were crossing the great bridge over the Volturnus, in the very earliest gray of the dawn. Soon the road began to grow steeper, as they approached the fertile slopes of Mount Massicus, under which lay the fair city of Sinuessa, with the harbour and pharos, and the blue sea stretching out beyond, infinitely vast—not a land-locked bay, as at Baiae, but the Great Sea itself.

When they arrived at Sinuessa—towards the fourth hour of the day—even the Praetorians showed such unmistakable signs of fatigue, that Casperius was obliged to call a halt. But he informed Piso that four hours' rest was the utmost he could allow, as they must sleep in Minturnae that night. So, about two hours after noon, the horns were sounded, the sleepy troopers shook off the straw on which they had lain, the coachmen and ostlers put to, and they set off again, down the long spurs of Massicus—seeing Vesuvius and the familiar hills no more—into the plain of silent Liris, fringed with greening willows,

till, just before sunset, they crossed the river by the bridge of boats, and were at Minturnae, on the Appian Way. That name, and the walls and towers of Minturnae seemed to Calpurnia to be a foretaste of the glories of Rome.

Calpurnia slept without dreaming in a large room in the Inn, where all the female travellers lay together. The horns awoke her at dawn, and by the time the sun had risen, they were passing out at the gate. The road lay over the Minturnian Marshes, through a country growing more rich and lovely every moment, with the sea always in sight on the left, until they came to the long, narrow street of beautiful Formiae, lying between the hills. There Piso looked out anxiously in hopes of seeing Maurieus, although Aemilia reminded him that her uncle must be already gone to Rome. Casperius still hurried them on. The road, now beginning to ascend, sometimes in view of the sea, sometimes turning inland, had been growing more and more frequented, and now the stream of travellers began to be incessant. Senators, knights, merchants, families returning to Rome from all the winter resorts along the coast ; Jew traders with high caps and flowing beards, orderlies carrying messages, shepherds with their sheep and goatherds with their goats, drovers of mules and asses, ox-carts covered with awnings, travellers spinning along in light post-

chaises or in heavy rhedae, travellers on horseback or in litters, Imperial posts going at a long running trot, and looking only anxious to arrive, peasants riding on asses, and foot-passengers toiling wearily after their laden beasts—all of them with their face set towards Rome. Great and small gave place to let Piso and his escort pass. Piso kept the curtains of the carriage closely drawn on his side; but Calpurnia peeped out on hers, and saw many a hand part the curtains or open the lattice of a dainty litter, and a delicate, weary face look forth to see who it was that travelled to Rome with an Imperial Guard. Near Formiae, they passed a lofty sepulchre, which Piso said was the tomb of Cicero, and Calpurnia saw him gaze on it very earnestly.

The Appian Way climbed higher and higher into the defiles of the Caecuban Hills, till, as the sun began to decline, the travellers saw below them, in the plain, the old walls of Fundi, with their deserted, once-famous vineyards. Here Casperius permitted them to sup; but insisted on pushing on after supper to Anxur-on-hill. As they drew nearer Rome, Calpurnia's spirits, which had flagged a little from fatigue, revived again, and visions of the Shows cheered many a long mile. Her father *must* let her go. If he demurred, she would implore him on her knees. It was to her incomprehensible that he did

not care about Shows. Her uncles Maurieus and Arulenus disliked them; but they were Stoics, and Stoics were so severe, and never liked anything fine or grand. If they had it all *their* way, we should be very dull.

How surprised Marcella would be to see her, and how delighted! And surely now the Emperor would restore his favours to her father; Calpurnia thought he could not be as bad as people said—the letter was so very kind. And now they seemed indeed to be approaching the City. As they crossed the dreary reaches of the Pontine Marsh, the Appian Way and the canal which Augustus dug beside it were as crowded and noisy as the Forum of Baiae on a Festival. The bargees trolled out boating-songs and chaffed the landsmen, and the whole highway—by land and water—was alive. Business and pleasure jostled each other, and even as night fell the traffic scarcely slackened. Casperius had said that they must be in Rome next morning—he had received a message at Appii Forum to hasten. And so, after an uncomfortable supper, they went on all night, and Calpurnia, quite worn out, slept. The night seemed to her as long as a year. Up hill and down hill they went, and then the day broke, and her father drew aside the curtains of the carriage and bade them look out and behold Rome.

Before them, like a gray sea, lay the wide Campagna, the mists of night just beginning to roll away, as a scroll folds itself together. And spreading far over the Campagna lay the City—a vast confusion of palaces and towers, their golden roofs and battlements glistening in the first long level rays of the rising sun. Piso gazed silently for a few moments, and then drew the curtain again, and, covering his head, seemed to sleep. But Calpurnia thought he wept, and was troubled by a vague awe at seeing emotion so much more profound than she could fathom.

At Bovillae, where they stopped to change horses for the last time, Julius came up to speak to them, pale and agitated. "You have seen the City?" he said. His father embraced him without a word. The last stage of the Appian Way was as it were the vestibule of Rome—a vestibule lined with sepulchres and temples. The vast mausolea looked like citadels, at whose doors colossal lions, or perhaps dark cypress-trees, kept eternal guard. Statues, busts, and bas-reliefs of the departed looked on with stony eyes, while between these banks of death the river of life rolled in an ever-gathering tide.

"We were as thou, thou shalt be as we. *Siste, Viator.*"

But neither business nor pleasure could stay. On rolled the carriages, scattering the sheep among the

tombs, till the shepherds drove them out again. The monuments grew more imposing, and more interspersed with gardens and houses, till the street of the dead became a street of the living. The beggars swarmed out of the Valley of Egeria, and impudently besieged the passers-by, but were scared at sight of the Praetorians. A few moments more brought Piso to the ancient arches and moss-grown, moist Capena, and they were in Rome.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRIAL OF APOLLONIUS OF TYANA.

As soon as they were within the walls, Casperius, dismounting from his horse, approached the carriage, and informed Piso that here his duty terminated. Piso, with grave courtesy, thanked him for his attention, and requested permission to present the soldiers with a small gratification—at the same time calling Nicomachus, to whom he had before given orders.

"You are liberal, Piso," said Casperius. "My men have only obeyed Caesar's orders. Of course, if you choose—but I must not see it."

Nicomachus meanwhile had discreetly slipped a substantial purse of gold into the centurion's hand, and Piso, saluting Casperius, the Praetorians rode off up the Triumphal Way, while Piso's coachman took the road to the Coelian, and thus, in modest guise, and almost unobserved, the head of the great Calpurnian house returned to his ancestral home.

The stately mansion of the Pisos on the Coelian had been partly rebuilt, and such great additions made to it, that old Piso Frugi the Annalist, who built it, would have been puzzled to identify it. It stood not far from the Great Temple of Diana, and commanded a view of the Palatine, and of the Circus Maximus in the valley between. As the carriage drew up, the travellers saw that a litter was standing at the door, and beside it, its bearers and an officer of the Palatine, who, almost before Piso could alight, came forward, and informed him that Caesar commanded his immediate attendance. His orders were so peremptory, that Piso was not even permitted to bathe and change his toga after his journey, but was hurried into the litter without having stepped across his own threshold. The officer, who treated Piso with all the respect compatible with such haste, reassured the ladies by telling them that the trial of Apollonius the Tyanean, for performing magic rites in order to learn who should succeed to the Empire, was to take place that day, and the Emperor desired Piso to be present. This information was not entirely reassuring; but any hesitation or remonstrance would have been worse than useless, and, hastily embracing his family, Piso got into the litter, and was carried away to the Palatine.

A crowd was assembled at the Palace Gates, and

many persons were passing in and out. Piso and his conductor were instantly admitted, and hurried, through magnificent halls and corridors—where precious marbles, polished like mirrors, reflected costly statues, and rare plants—to an inner hall, painted with scenes from the life and death of Adonis, and embellished with great shells, like those used at Assyrian festivals, filled with earth, in which grew lettuces and other herbs, giving the hall the appearance of a garden. At the farther end of this hall stood a small group of persons, wearing the senatorial broad stripe, gathered round another clad in purple, whom Piso instantly recognized as the Emperor.

The Master of Thirty Legions—and, through them, of the whole civilized world—was tall of stature, and had been of a fair and comely figure, until an illness caused his stomach to swell and his legs to waste away. His complexion, of a settled redness, and in late years bloated and disfigured by an ulcerous humour, was apt at the smallest excitement to flush crimson, and his bushy, overhanging eyebrows increased the terrific effect of a countenance whose most natural expression seemed one of fury. Yet a certain breadth of feature—and perhaps the natural fairness of the skin, and the downcast look of eyes which did not willingly bear the light—had given Domitian an air of modesty and ingenuousness, until

his passions effaced all other writing there. He was little more than forty-two years old, but was already growing bald, and, perhaps to conceal this defect, he wore a laurel crown. A little aside stood a slave, holding in leash a Numidian lion, crouched like a dog on the marble floor.

As Piso approached, the courtiers retired, and the Emperor, advancing to meet him, exclaimed, "What, my dear Piso! Returned at last?" and embraced him. "You come just in time," he continued, "to hear me question this Tyanean—or Ephesian, as we might as well call him. A very remarkable man, Piso, and I am not yet convinced of his guilt. Let us to the Court."

The trial was to take place in the Basilica of the Palace, which was fitted up for the occasion rather as for a panegyric than for a trial. The galleries were crowded with citizens of the baser sort, while the body of the hall was filled with knights, advocates, and even Senators, the Empress and her ladies being in the latticed gallery at the end. The hum of voices ceased, and all who had seats rose as Domitian entered with his attendants—among whom Parthenius the Chamberlain was conspicuous for the splendour of his dress. The Emperor sat down in the chair of state, upon the tribune—where also the more distinguished Senators and the advocates in charge of

the case had their places. Domitian himself assigned Piso a seat very near his own, and in full view of every one in the Court. Piso saw faces that he knew —some not seen for eight years, others those of friends who had kept up a friendship with him during his seclusion. The venerable Nerva—whose name was whispered in connection with the accused—sat on Domitian's right, next to Flavius Clemens, who greeted Piso with a grave smile. On a table placed a little below the tribune, stood the clepsydra; round the table were seated the most eminent advocates, especially those who were to take part in the proceedings. Piso recogized most of them. There was the rat-like face of Fabricius Veiento—his hair more grizzled than of old—and the livid visage of Aquilius Regulus, working with suppressed excitement and rendered startling by the eccentric affectation of painting round one of his eyes, to indicate on which side he was to plead. As on the present occasion he was to conduct the prosecution, he had painted a broad white circle round his right eye. Among the advocates, Piso saw also the evil, hungry countenance of blind old Catullus Messalinus, who was eagerly whispering to some one behind him—a slender, very dark man, with lank black hair just touched with gray, and full bright, black eyes. Catullus seemed to be asking something about Piso, for the person

whom he addressed glanced at Piso before he replied. Among the Senators behind, sat Arulenus, and next him, the brother of Regulus—a simple honest soldier. Near him, a much younger man, of scholarly aspect, but with a very modest air, and mild, near-sighted eyes, was evidently trying in vain to make out who it was that everybody was looking at; for either the distinction of Piso's bearing or the singularity of his attire—he was still in his travelling-cloak—had drawn most eyes to him.

But Piso had little time to seek the faces of his friends. There was a movement in the Court, and the prisoner was seen approaching the bar. Piso had heard much of this famous philosopher-magician, whose fame had spread throughout the whole Empire, and yet who was said by those who knew him best to repudiate the title of magician, and scarcely to claim that of philosopher. His hair had been cut short, and his beard shaved, by the Emperor's order—perhaps to lessen the dignity of his appearance, and he was in consequence less imposing than when at Athens he had struck Eudoxus with awe. But the dignity which is given by self-possession and simplicity was perhaps only the more conspicuous, because it was not set off by so much as a flowing beard. He held in his hand a scroll, which contained his defence. He was perfectly upright, and his spare, active figure

made him seem even taller than he was, as he stood there in his closely-girded linen garments, with shoes of bark upon his feet. "He might be Pythagoras," whispered some one near Piso. Apollonius did not blench even when Domitian bent his shaggy brows, and watched him from that covert, as a lion watches his prey from behind the jungle-grass. As Regulus rose to speak, Apollonius fixed his eyes upon him, and appeared to listen intently. He was charged with having met a Senator in a field, on a certain night of the waning moon, and there sacrificed a boy, in order to learn by this frightful means how long Domitian would live, and who was destined to be his successor. Every one knew that the Senator was Marcus Cocceius Nerva, and all eyes turned to where Nerva sat. But although he was pale and anxious, he did not exhibit any signs of fear, but, like the prisoner, kept his eyes fixed on Regulus. Very few witnesses were called for the prosecution, but it was known that Apollonius himself was to be questioned in Court. Regulus, who, without one of the qualities which go to make an orator, had by sheer force of determination contrived to pass as one of the most eminent of his day, began his speech in a weak voice, which, as he lashed himself into passion, rose to hysteric hoarseness. He was very ungainly in his gestures, and so constantly consulted his notes that

he often lost the thread of his speech. His only strength lay in the great pains he took, in the singular venom of his attack, and the energy with which, in spite of his unfortunate voice and delivery, he could pursue his victim. It was this which had made him one of the most dreaded of the Crown-prosecutors and informers of his time, and had enabled him to amass an enormous fortune, swollen by his share of the confiscated estates of his victims. On this occasion he scarcely equalled himself. He began vaguely and diffusely—then, warming to his subject, exhausted himself in denunciations of the wickedness of speculating on the death of a Prince so beloved, so illustrious, so victorious, as Domitian—the finished scholar, the patron of literature, the Father of his people—the advocate's epithets came so fast that they almost choked him, and he was obliged to drink a glass of water before he could go on to the most telling part of his oration, which consisted of a highly sensational description of the hellish incantation said to have been performed by Apollonius. But he called no witnesses of any importance. When he had concluded, Apollonius, perfectly unmoved, and addressing Domitian in a voice which, though not pitched high, was distinctly heard in all parts of the Court, requested permission to read his defence.

It was long, and consisted partly of an exposition

of philosophical principles, partly of an actual reply to the charge. Apollonius set up an alibi. On the night on which the incantation was said to have been performed, he was, he said, sitting by the death-bed of Philiscus of Melos, the Philosopher, formerly his own pupil. The Consul Telesimus was there too, with the physicians Seleucus of Cyzicus, and Stratocles of Sidon, and also the relations of Philiscus and thirty of his disciples.

"The relations are gone to Melos for the funeral," said Apollonius, lifting his head from bending over the scroll, and fixing his clear bright eyes on Domitian —who lay back in his chair, watching him under his hand—"but the others are all here."

A murmur ran through the hall, as the witnesses—the venerable Telesimus, who had been Consul under Nero, leading the way—rose in a body and approached the table. But the Emperor, interposing, handed his tablets to Regulus, on which he had written some questions which he desired should be put to the accused.

"Why do you wear those strange garments?" asked Regulus, reading from the tablets.

"I wear linen because I will not injure poor animals," replied Apollonius. "I do but imitate Pythagoras, who, as your own histories boast, instructed the wise King Numa——"

"Why do men call you a God?" asked Regulus, cutting him short.

"Every good man deserves to be called so," answered the philosopher, calmly.

"Now, tell us, Apollonius, how did you foretell the Plague at Ephesus?" said Regulus, insinuatingly. "Was it by an instinctive impulse, or was it a mere conjecture?"

"By living on a lighter diet than other men, and by disciplining my body," replied Apollonius, "I have cleared my inward vision—which in most men is obscured by gross appetites and passions. Thus I was the first to perceive its approach. It is true that I see more than other men, but the means whereby I do so are not secret. If you will, I will enumerate the causes of pestilent diseases——"

"No, no; it is not necessary," exclaimed the Emperor, hastily. "Ask him the last question."

"On whose account, Apollonius, did you sacrifice a boy the day you left your house and went into the country?" asked Regulus, pouncing on Apollonius with his question.

To the surprise of every one, Apollonius did not immediately answer. He stood motionless, as if in deep thought, while the drip of the clepsydra was distinctly heard in the silence. He appeared to have forgotten where he was, and to have fallen into one

of those trances which philosophers of his school specially affected. But his answer, when it came, did not seem to have required such long consideration.

"*If* I left my house," he said at last, steadily returning Regulus's gaze, "I will confess that I sacrificed. Here stand my witnesses—ask them where I was that night."

Subdued applause again broke out in the Court, instantly suppressed, as Domitian with a gesture of his hand commanded silence. The witnesses were briefly examined, and testified that Apollonius passed the night in question at the death-bed of Philiscus.

"The accused is acquitted," said Domitian, rising; "but let him be detained," he added to Parthenius, "that I may hold further private conversation with him."

The Emperor retired, signifying to Piso that he was to follow; but before the imperial suite could reach the door which led from the tribune, there arose a great hubbub in the Basilica. Domitian changed colour, and his hand sought the dagger he always wore. He hastily passed into the adjoining hall—the same in which he had received Piso—and desired Parthenius to see what was the matter. Meanwhile, no one spoke, but all stood listening to the sounds which came in through the open doorway.

In a few moments, Parthenius returned, and with

him an officer of the guard, who was evidently in a state of the utmost consternation.

"A most extraordinary circumstance, Caesar," said the Chamberlain. "Apollonius has vanished——"

"Vanished!" bellowed Domitian, in a wild-beast fury. "Escaped—escaped by the treachery of these slaves——"

"Crucify me, Caesar," cried the wretched centurion, falling at Domitian's feet; "crucify me if you will, but do not accuse me of treachery! One moment I had him—the next, he was gone. Ask for yourself. He is a magician, and he has doubtless made himself invisible——"

"Villain! did you not search him, as I bade you?"

"May I be your sacrifice, Caesar! I and the beadles and officers searched him thoroughly this morning, at the door of the Palace, before he set his accursed foot across your sacred threshold. He had nothing but the scroll, and we unrolled that, and shook it. There was a freedman of Euphrates the philosopher standing by—he saw us. But no doubt he had swallowed cameleon paste. By the Immortal Gods! I have been tricked by a magician!"

"Let the doors of the Basilica be closed, and a search be made," said Domitian.

"It is done already, Caesar," replied Parthenius. "As soon as the alarm was given, the Praefect

Norbanus shut the doors. I found those in charge of the prisoner all accusing one another, with every sign of consternation. They all say the same—one moment he was there; the next, he was gone. As he had been acquitted, no one had his hand upon him; but the officers surrounded him. If he slipped into the crowd and disguised himself, we shall catch him at the doors."

"See that you do; I will not be tricked and made a laughing-stock," said Domitian, angrily. Then, turning to Piso, he added, "Until this foolish affair is cleared up, Piso, return to your own house. I will not detain you. You will be present, of course, with all your family, at the Shows to-morrow. Parthenius, bring me word when Apollonius is found."

So saying, he left the hall by a door which led to the private apartments.

Flavius Clemens, who was among the persons who had followed the Emperor into the Hall of Adonis, now came up to Piso and embraced him affectionately.

"It is long since I saw you, Piso," he said in a low voice; "but not of my own free will. I am, unhappily, too near a throne to be free."

Flavius Clemens had the broad Flavian features and massive frame, but he had that stoop of the shoulders which belongs rather to a scholar than a soldier, and he was somewhat gaunt and hollow-

chested. His hair was a lightish brown, and his eyes gray and very deep set. In his whole appearance there was an air of dignified languor, as of a man whose surroundings are distasteful to him, but who submits to what he cannot escape.

"Domitilla will be glad to hear you are arrived," he said. "I and she will come to see you as soon as the Games are over. For to-day, you will need some repose after your journey."

Piso walked home unattended, choosing byways, to avoid being recognized and detained; but, even so, he everywhere saw signs of preparation for the Show. Crowds surrounded the Coliseum, the Palatine entrance to which was being draped with rich hangings. A gigantic awning was being stretched across the whole Forum, under which a number of temporary booths had been erected, while men dressed in fantastic garments were hawking about bills of the Show, and bawling announcements of fresh attractions, between every one of which they took care to vociferate in their most stentorian tones that all this was "by the munificence of the Illustrious Stella the poet, and in honour of the glorious victories of our Lord God Titus Flavius Domitianus Augustus."

Aemilia, who had been terribly frightened at the peremptory summons of the Emperor, received her husband with transports of delight. So great had

been the anxiety of the whole family, that none of them had even taken the bath or changed their clothes. Piso found Arulenus and Mauricus at his house. They had hurried away the moment the Emperor left the Tribunal, and had been so fortunate as to gain the doors before the alarm was raised of the disappearance of Apollonius, of which, therefore, they knew nothing. But they soon took their leave, lest they should keep the travellers from the repose they so much needed to prepare them for the new fatigues of the morrow.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FLAVIAN AMPHITHEATRE.

Very soon after midnight, the more enthusiastic of the plebeian sight-seers began to climb the stairs to the seats assigned to the populace, and, wrapped in their ample cloaks, finished the night stretched on the wooden benches. On the stone seats below, many a dark heap showed where the locarii were in possession. They were come to secure seats which they were prepared, for a consideration, to resign to late-comers. They could have had but little sleep. The bustle of coming and going filled the air. Cushions were being flung down on the seats of the Senators and Knights. Gangs of slaves were strewing the arena, amidst cries and mock-encounters with the rakers. A hollow thunder resounded from the lower passages and corridors, as fresh casks of sand were rolled along them—the bass to a treble of laughter, oaths, and shouting, with an *obbligato* every now and then from the wild beasts in their cages underground

—the hyaenas outlaughing the men, as the ferocious passions of the mob would on the morrow burst through the veneer of civilization, and show the beast underneath the man; while from time to time the roar of a hungry lion would drown all the other noises, as the breaking of an angry billow sweeps with it all the voices of the storm. The vast Amphitheatre was indeed more noisy this night than a ship making head against Aquilo. Its solid walls did not creak and groan like those wooden ones of Curio's mad theatre—in which he swung all Rome round on a pivot, and had like to have anticipated Caligula's wish, if his windlasses had broken. But the rattling of the poles of the great awning, and the sailors from Misenum calling to each other as they dropped them into their sockets in the cornice, were like enough to the sounds of shipboard to bring dreams of shipwreck to the uneasy sleepers.

By the time the cocks ceased crowing the whole city was awake, and the gaily-dressed crowds were pouring into the Forum, swarming down the Suburra, and trooping over the bridges, till all the ways leading to the Amphitheatre were choked with people. Most of them carried baskets of provisions, and broad hats and parasols—in case the wind should prevent the spreading of the velum. Early as it was, the crush at the entrance was so great that people's clothes

were torn off their backs, and many a smartly striped parasol was disabled. By dawn the upper part of the Amphitheatre was nearly full, and the noise of the multitude rose up like the roar of Rome herself on a market-day. The women on the topmost tier were shrieking at the loud flapping of the awning ropes. As the occasion was a triumph, almost every one of the condition of a citizen wore his toga, and an extraordinary festivity was given to the scene by those masses of white, relieved by the purple stripes of the Senators and Knights, the scarlet and saffron cloaks, the gay dresses of the women—the whole effect immeasurably enhanced by the vastness of the empty space of the arena—lying white and fair in the midst, strewn with glittering flakes of powdered mica, fringed with the amber-stained nets which protected the podium from the wild beasts, and appearing yet larger and more empty for the three garlanded altars which stood in the centre. As Piso and his party reached the podium, the huge building looked like a single gigantic flower, of which the arena formed the heart, and the rows upon rows of spectators the many-coloured petals; while the tremendous hubbub might have proceeded from swarms of invisible bees. So loud was the buzz of the multitude, that the keepers of the seats could only indicate in dumb show the place of the Senators, on the front row of the

podium, where those who were of Curule dignity sat in their ivory chairs. The ladies mounted higher, to the gallery appointed for women. As Calpurnia climbed after her mother, she noticed a tall, thin, cadaverous-looking man, who was calling her father from the Senators' seats.

"There is plenty of room here, Piso," cried this person, in a shrill but feeble voice, and beckoning with what Calpurnia thought a very ungraceful gesture of his arm. "Crassus and I have been keeping a place for you near ourselves this half-hour!"

As Regulus—for it was he—said this, Calpurnia saw the keen face and sinister eyes of Crassus looking over his shoulder, and a shudder ran through her—it was still early, and the air was cool.

"I thank you, Regulus," said Piso, with his usual grave courtesy. "As soon as I have seen the ladies in their seats, I will come."

At first, Calpurnia felt giddy as she looked down on the living sea, which seemed to be rippling gently round the vast Amphitheatre. She could see her father returning the greetings of the Senators. She saw her two uncles, and noticed that her father had placed himself beside Mauricus, with Regulus on his other side. This, then, was the famous orator, and infamous informer, of whom she had heard so much! He appeared to be overwhelming her father with

attentions—arranging his cloak for him; calling for a footstool, which Piso declined—and seeming determined that his politeness should be observed by every one in the Amphitheatre. A great many people evidently *had* noticed it, and were looking at Piso. Calpurnia, her eager young eyes drinking in every detail of the scene, saw first one and then another group of spectators craning their necks, and screwing themselves into all sorts of uncomfortable positions in order to watch the Senatorial benches. It was some time before she realized that all these curious eyes were directed at her father. Perhaps she would not then have known it, had she not heard some one behind her—among the wives of the Knights—saying, "But which is he? Which is Piso?" And then she remembered how, as they came up the stairs, all heads had seemed to be turned their way.

"I think the people are looking at my father," she whispered to her mother.

Aemilia pressed her hand, but did not reply. Calpurnia was surprised at the expression of her face—it was so very still and grave. If she did not care for the Show, thought Calpurnia, surely she was pleased that the people were all so eager to see her father, and had not forgotten him?

Meanwhile, more and more people were thronging in to the upper seats, and, amidst a great uproar,

the heralds were dragging some one from the Knights' benches. He was attired in a remarkably brilliant scarlet cloak, with a hood drawn over his head. He resisted the attempt to oust him, and there was a scuffle, followed by a roar of laughter, amidst which some one held up a large key, and the crestfallen impostor, proved by this key to be only a slave, vanished down a stairway. Another lively altercation on a row of seats above the Knights' was just ending more seriously. A woman shrieked, and, as Calpurnia looked up, she saw a knife flash, and thought she caught a glimpse of Theophila clinging to a man's arm.

"Oceanus! Leitus!" cried a dozen voices, and the two attendants who had just turned the audacious janitor out of the Knights' seats, rushed up with their truncheons, and began soundly belabouring two men, who, locked in each other's arms, were contending for the possession of the disputed place with as much fury as if an empire were at stake. As Calpurnia's eyes grew more accustomed to the sea of faces and to the dizzy height, she saw many persons whom she knew—Marcellus the Duumvir, father of her friend Marcella, and Balbus the Aedile, and Cotilus, and many others she had seen at Baiae; but she was not again able to find Theophila. Calpurnia was so engrossed in looking for her that it was some

time before she saw Marcella, sitting not very far off, near Fulvia, the wife of Balbus, evidently highly delighted at the prospect of at last seeing a Show.

And now suddenly all the hubbub ceased, as a blaze of trumpets broke out, mingling with the sweet strains of Lydian flutes, and at the same instant two processions entered the Amphitheatre—that of the Emperor, from behind the imperial seat, and the Pomp, or grand procession of the Show, which came in at the great entrance towards the Forum. As the whole vast assembly—nearly ninety thousand persons being present—rose to its feet, the huge proportions of the building appeared truly appalling. From the gallery of the podium, where, on either side of the ivory canopy of Caesar's throne, sat the Senate, the Consuls, and the other great officers, the foreign ambassadors—conspicuous in barbaric splendour—the four Colleges of Priests, and the Vestal Virgins, the seats rose in four great stories, the fourth being of wood, with a platform still higher, supported by short marble columns, for the working of the awning. Twenty thousand persons had found places on this highest terrace of all, and when Calpurnia looked up as the people rose, it seemed to her that the whole vast building itself arose—a living wall circling round the glittering arena.

It was amidst the rustle of the rising of this vast

multitude, the flourish of trumpets, the soft breathings of the flutes, that Calpurnia first saw the Emperor Domitian.

He was clad to-day in a purple robe interwoven with gold. It was yet too early for the sun to look over the lofty walls of the Amphitheatre; but even now, as he moved, his garment glistened with a sheen like that of falling waters. Beside him stalked the lion which Piso had seen the day before. He wore a golden collar, but appeared to be unchained, and, as he went, he caressed the Emperor's knees with sinuous, cat-like motions of his lithe tawny body. Behind the Emperor came the Empress Domitia, flashing all over with jewels, her black hair piled up in a mountain of small curls, above which a number of gold pins stood out round her head, like the rays of the sun.

Parthenius the Chamberlain led Domitia to a golden chair placed on a lower step, but close to the Emperor's seat. Flavius Clemens, his wife Domitilla, and their sons—now acknowledged by the Emperor as his heirs—next took their places. A crowd of palace-officers filled up the other vacant chairs near the throne, among them Petronius and Norbanus, Praefects of the Praetorians, resplendent in full armour; while a little boy, dressed in scarlet, with a head far too large for his dwarfish body, emerged as it seemed from

the very folds of the Emperor's robes, and squatted on the step of the imperial seat—a burning spot of colour even amidst all that lavish display.

As Domitian sank carelessly upon the cushions, the people shouted, their deep-throated Roman voices filling the space with an ocean of sound, which seemed to well up and overflow into the blue sky above, and flood the very air. Miles out on the Campagna that shout awakened the silences, and startled the goatherds among the rocks of Fabia, high up above Hannibal's Camp, and the shepherds watching their sheep feed round the Sepulchres of the Gauls on the Gabian Way, or playing on their pipes in the grass-grown Forum of Veii. Even the swine-herds under the oaks of Laurentum heard it, and the fever-worn peasants of Ardea and the Marsh lifted their wan faces from the pestilent furrows and looked towards Rome.

Domitian acknowledged the homage of the podium by a majestic wave of the hand; but to the upper galleries, he bowed and kissed his fingers, and smiled and touched his laurel crown, while again and again rose that hoarse shout of a whole people, until the wild beasts in the dens below the arena, lifted up their voices in reply, and the lion who lay with his head resting on Domitian's feet looked up with bristling mane, and growled, till Caesar kicked him into silence

with his golden sandal. Meanwhile, most of the Senators present, and Piso among them, left their seats, to go down to the great entrance, and join the Procession of the Show—in a Roman's eyes the most glorious sight—except a Triumph—that earth afforded, and to witness which, a Roman mob would have sold its own soul. Already it was defiling through the great bronze gates on to the arena, heralded by a joyful flourish of trumpets, followed by the soft flutes. First out of the darkness of the gateway came the musicians on foot, then the popes leading three white lambs for sacrifice, and then the great car of the Gods, all glorious with silver and ivory, drawn by four milk-white steeds. They tossed their flowing manes and stepped proudly, as though they knew that they bore the Sacred Images of the Gods of Rome, nodding majestic beneath the silver canopy—the face of Jupiter painted in vermilion, in the terrible fashion learned from Etruscan Volcanius. A great number of boys of the noblest houses of Rome—*patrimi et matrimi*—held the ropes which steadied the car—the proudest of the Senators pressing round to lay but a finger on these ropes. Behind, other sacred images were carried on splendid trays, high on men's shoulders, and with them, the images of the Caesars. Then, amidst a great following, came the Chief Pontiff, the priests, the haruspices, Stella, the

Editor of the Games, with a great and splendid train of Roman nobles, and immediately after him the procession of chariots—more than a hundred of them—two abreast, chariots, charioteers, and horses all in the colours of their factions. To the four factions of the seasons—the green, red, blue, and white—Domitian had added two more—purple and gold, and as all this splendour of colour and motion overflowed into the arena, the spectators could not contain their delight. They clapped their hands, they shouted the names of their favourite charioteers, and those in the upper galleries were so transported with delight that it seemed as though they would cast themselves down headlong in their ecstasy. Just then, as if by magic, the arena itself turned from white to scarlet, and sweet perfumes filled the air. The applause became deafening—the vast assembly seemed gone mad with rapture. Behind the chariots came a great crowd of persons variously attired, some in ancient garb ; then a group of half-naked savage-looking fellows, one of whom bore the rostrum of a galley, and another a cross. These were the robbers who were to represent the Play of the Pirates. A number of galleys, drawn on wheels by elephants, came behind, and were greeted with fresh bursts of applause. Next came the gladiators, some in complete armour, some with the trident and net of the retiarius, mirmillones with

bucklers and scimitars, Thracians with round shields and short broadswords—all marching in compact order, the dull heavy sound of their tramp shaking the earth as they came. After them followed a horde of Sarmatian prisoners, their hands bound behind them, and their long hair hanging wildly over their faces. Last of all came two men, one leading a lion, the other a hare. Musicians, attendants, and horsemen brought up the rear.

As all this pomp advanced across the arena, the horses pawing the ground and champing their bits, and the flashing wheels of the car grinding deep into the sand, they might have been wading through blood —the red perfumes which had been sprinkled on the sand stained the horses' hoofs and the chariot wheels with so deep a dye.

The Emperor himself, who alone had till now remained seated, rose as the sacred car of the Gods entered the Amphitheatre. The procession defiled past the imperial seat—the gladiators clashing their swords upon their shields as they passed, with a wild cry—"Hail, Caesar! We that are to die salute thee!" and, almost completing the circuit of the arena, it halted under the pulvinar of the Gods, which was prepared opposite to the Emperor's seat. The sacred images were carried up to the pulvinar with great reverence, and laid upon the purple cushions. Then,

the Chief Pontiff standing before the middle altar, silence was proclaimed, and the victims were offered. While the sacrifice was being consumed, the chariots were driven off, as they were not to run on the first day of the Shows, and those spectators who had taken part in the procession resumed their seats. The Priest of Jupiter and the College of the Flaviales, dressed in scarlet, and wearing golden crowns with the effigies of the Three Great Gods and of the Emperor, took their places close by the imperial couch, while Stella was conducted to the raised seat appointed for the Editor of the Games, from which conspicuous position his handsome florid person, set off by the utmost magnificence of dress, drew all eyes upon him.

Meanwhile, the arena had been cleared, the altars removed, and only the gladiators were left standing in a dark compact mass in the midst of the glistening sand.

First came the sham battle, with wooden swords, which resounded through the Amphitheatre as the skulls of fighting stags resound through a forest. But presently, at a signal from Stella, the wooden swords were exchanged for real ones, whose edge was carefully tried before they were delivered to the combatants—several pairs of wrestlers keeping the people amused while these preparations were made for

the real combat. Suddenly, the trumpet sounded, and the gladiators opening out their ranks, and stepping back, left a mirmillo and a retiarius alone in the arena. A breathless silence succeeded to the loud hum of voices, and all heads craned forward in a delicious agony of suspense. The mirmillo, with his heavy Gallic armour, his fish-crested helmet, his large oblong shield, his short sword, and his legs and feet protected with thongs of leather, stood motionless, his shield held to the level of his eyes, his right arm drawn back ready to strike. In front of him jauntily pranced the almost naked retiarius, bare-headed, bare-footed, armed only with his net and his three-pronged fork—which he now grounded like a trident in the sand, sending up a shining cloud of mica, now brandished at the mirmillo. Then he made a feint to throw his net, and the mirmillo sprang aside, lifting his shield so high against the net, that the trident of the retiarius caught him in the body. But he was so closely bound with leather thongs, that he escaped unwounded. He had succeeded in evading the net, which lay in a heap beside him, and he now turned and fled, exciting the laughter of the spectators by the contrast his encumbered motions afforded to the nimble alertness of the retiarius. Round three parts of the arena he fled, often facing upon his foe—but the last time he was

one instant too late. The net fell over him, entangling him in its folds. In vain he strove with sword and shield to rend the meshes—the retiarius was upon him—the trident hurled him backwards, and, caught in the net, he lost his balance, and fell, ploughing up the sand, yet skilfully contrived to fall under, and not upon his shield. This saved his life. The people had been disgusted at the shortness of the encounter, and groans had saluted his fall. But a certain desperation in the way in which he gathered himself up, tortoise-like, beneath his shield, and thrust the point of his sword through a mesh, in defiance, so far restored their good humour, that the upper galleries turning down their thumbs, the rest followed their example. The retiarius, flinging away his trident, roughly pulled his adversary to his feet, and the mirmillo slipped away behind the set-scene, whence trap-doors led to the chambers below. It had been expected that the *Proelium*, or *melée*, would follow; but with a flourish of trumpets, a second Pomp now advanced into the arena, while bills were distributed among the spectators setting forth that the illustrious Stella had determined to exhibit the Games for three whole days —the first day to consist chiefly of combats of beasts with men, or of beasts with beasts, interspersed with scenic spectacles. Before the spectators could read half the promises which Stella made, the first earnest

of his munificence was before their eyes. A magnificent procession of animals was slowly making the circuit of the arena.

First came a majestic African elephant, his tusks gilded, and golden earrings in his ears. He was evidently accustomed to crowds, for, as he walked, he presented his trunk, hoping no doubt to receive tokens of favour, in the shape of cakes and fruit, and a few were thrown him. But the heralds rushing forward, forbade this with voice and gesture, only just in time to save the procession from being cast into inextricable confusion. The elephant was not led, but two gorgeously dressed Nubians ran beside him. After him, walking two by two, held in leash by stalwart barbarians, arrayed in blue, green, crimson, and gold, came tigers, leopards, bears, stags, buffaloes—Ganymede with his eagle, Europa with her bull, Hercules with the Nemean lion, boys with hares in leash, a rhinoceros, a huge Calydonian boar, ostriches with boys astride them, and lastly a pair of cameleopards. Many of these beasts were yoked to chariots in which rode mythological personages—Perseus, with the Gorgon's head; Daedalus, his wings drooping from his shoulders; Hero and Leander; Cupid and Psyche; Paris and Fair Helen of Troy. And drawn by the cameleopards came a large car, fashioned like the ship *Argo*, in which stood

Jason and the Argonauts, with the Golden Fleece hanging from the mast, and Orpheus playing upon his lyre.

Amidst the deafening applause which greeted this procession, a great roar of "Carpophorus! Carpophorus!" went up from the upper seats, and he who represented Hercules repeatedly kissed his fingers in acknowledgment. Opposite to the Emperor's seat, the elephant knelt down, apparently unbidden, and with his trunk waved an obeisance. At this the applause was redoubled; but it reached its height when Caesar himself, graciously acknowledging this noble beast's homage, flung him a cake with such dexterity that the elephant caught it in his open mouth.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"ORPHEUS WITH HIS LUTE."

THE real play was now to begin. As if by magic, the arena was cleared—the led animals disappearing through the many doors in the wall of the podium, while the cars went out at the great gates, which were then shut with a mighty brazen clang—more stirring to a Roman mob than the trumpet of battle.

Carpophorus was left face to face with his lion. He was a magnificent young athlete, clad only in a lion's skin girt tight about his loins, armed only with a hunting-spear. The lion, perplexed at first by the liers-in-wait, who crouched under the podium, soon saw that Carpophorus was his enemy. Advancing with a few easy strides, he shook the tawny masses of his mane, and uttered a deep-chested roar which struck delicious terror to the heart of the most timid spectator. The beasts in the dens replied, until the Amphitheatre reverberated with yells and long-drawn howlings. Suddenly, Carpophorus shifted his position,

and at that instant the lion sprang. A sound as of a sighing wind ran through the vast assemblage, as every one drew in his breath. But with a leap almost as cat-like as that of the lion himself, Carpophorus had sprung aside, and, hurling his spear in the same moment, had transfixed the lion behind the shoulders. With one scream of mortal agony the King of the Forest tore madly at the sand, and rolled over dead. Carpophorus, with one foot on the lion's neck, drew out the ensanguined spear, looking, as he did so, like Hercules himself. Thunders of applause greeted his victory. He gracefully acknowledged them, while attendants dragged off the body of the lion.

Hardly had this been done, when a leopard bounded on to the arena, and, crouching low, lay lashing the sand with his tail. As this beast made no motion to begin the attack, Carpophorus advanced, brandishing his fatal spear, and carrying in his left hand a ball covered with scarlet cloth. He threw this ball to the leopard, who, as it rolled to him, caught it with an inconceivably quick movement of his paws, and began to mumble it, as though it had been a human head. The leopard's receding forehead and ears laid back gave him a terrible expression of feline ferocity, and his supple body and lean heaving sides, suggested that his spring would be yet more dreadful than the lion's—although he was evidently cowed, and required

more provocation. As soon as Carpophorus began to lessen the distance between them, the leopard turned, and with a few swift bounds was at the farthest end of the arena, where he crouched, palpitating with fear and fury, in spite of the efforts made by the trembling liers-in-wait, who now ventured out, and stirred him up with long spears. The people, angry at the beast's cowardice, jeered and yelled, and this discomfiting him still more, he again tried to flee, Carpophorus pursuing; while the mob in the upper galleries bellowed, "Don't kill him yet, dear little Carpophorus! Make him run! Give us some sport!" Carpophorus was too prudent to absolutely drive the leopard to bay; but he pressed him so hard, that at last the terrified beast—maddened by the yells which seemed to multiply his danger a thousandfold—made a frantic attempt to leap the wall of the podium. But such a possibility had been foreseen. With a desperate bound, he reached the bars which supported the nets, but only to find them revolve, and slip from under his claws. Wildly catching at the air, he hung on the net, while the people shrieked, and the Senators who were seated on that part of the podium made an undignified retreat. But before the leopard could disentangle his claws from the meshes of the net, Carpophorus threw his spear. It quivered in the leopard's heart, and the long, spotted body fell

on the sand like a sack of corn let fall from a waggon.

Carpophorus slew a bear, two bulls, a buffalo, and a bison, and, lastly, a wild she-boar, who fought with remarkable fury, and, while convulsed in the agonies of death, gave birth to a litter. Shocking as this circumstance may appear, it was hailed with transports of delight by a people who could not have their entertainments too highly spiced, and who, above all, craved for some novel sensation. By this time, the arena was much stained with blood, and the sand trampled by the many conflicts which had taken place. The dead beasts were dragged off with hooks, and a number of boys made their appearance, some with rakes, others with fresh sand—mixed this time with cinnabar. While this was being done, the same tame lion and hare which had formed part of the Pomp played together, chasing each other round the arena like dogs, the hare leaping over the lion without fear, and almost running into his jaws. This lion was the property of the Emperor, and was renowned for his combats with bulls, and he presently showed that, if he spared poor puss, it was not because the instincts of the wild beast were destroyed in him. Suddenly, as he gambolled with the hare, there was a shriek. Some said that one of the boys playfully struck the lion with his rake; others thought that

the smell of fresh blood had excited him. Whatever it was, it happened in an instant of time, and out of all the eyes that watched very few could say that they saw it. The lion struck out twice with his paw, and two of the boys lay on the arena, while the lion stood over them, growling. A keeper rushed forward, with a long whip in his hand; but the moment of fury was past, and the lion, as if ashamed of what he had done, relinquished his prey, and crouched down, only uttering a low growl, while the hare, terrified, fled out by an open door. There was a commotion in the Amphitheatre. The Emperor himself leaned forward on his seat, while a grave person in a long cloak entered the arena, and, stooping down, examined the prostrate figures of the boys. Having done so, he rose, and shook his head. The boys were dead, and in another moment their bodies had been removed.

"Lash him!" cried Domitian to the keeper.

The keeper brought the whip down upon the lion's yellow sides. He howled like a beaten dog, and crouched lower.

"Give him another—one for each boy!" said Domitian, and once more the culprit writhed under the keeper's whip—while the whole assembly, transported at this instance of Caesar's goodness, rose and applauded vociferously.

The chastisement, and the pangs of conscience—for he was, after all, a noble beast—had effectually cooled the lion, and the shouts of the people so completed his discomfiture, that when the keeper kicked him, he skulked off abashed, with drooping tail, and mane that swept the dust. Before, however, he reached the door leading down to the dens, both he and his misdeeds were forgotten in the storm of applause with which the spectators greeted two gladiators who had just stepped into the arena, and were saluting the Emperor. Shouts of "Verus! Verus!" "Priscus! Priscus!" rent the air. The champions seemed to divide the suffrages of the multitude pretty equally; but a slight tumult arose in one of the upper galleries between the rival partisans—quickly appeased by the herald proclaiming that Priscus and Verus were to fight with each other until one of them should confess himself conquered. At this, both factions applauded vehemently; and then, as if by common consent, there was so complete a silence that Calpurnia distinctly heard the grinding of the combatants' heels in the sand, as they took up their position.

Either these champions were too equally matched, or the result had been preconcerted. Each gave and received one or two wounds; but they were merely flesh-cuts, and the spectators began to grow restless. Those who were exposed to the sun opened their

parasols and put on their hats, and some of them even ventured to call out to the sailors to spread the awning. Domitian, who always favoured the common people, saw their impatience, and put an end to it by sending each of the champions a wooden sword—in sign of his discharge—and they retired amidst the applause of their respective factions.

A far more thrilling spectacle was now ready. A herald proclaimed that the Death of Orpheus would be represented, and before the words were out of his mouth, the central part of the arena was suddenly turned into a sylvan scene. Rocks, trees, and slopes of greensward rose as if by enchantment out of the ground. Birds sat on points of rock, sheep were feeding on the grass, and deer and hares, and even leopards and panthers, crouched in the underwood—no doubt drugged into semi-unconsciousness before they were bound to the branches. The effect was astonishing, and the sham landscape was greeted with deafening applause. As it subsided, the feeble and uncertain strains of a lute were heard—evidently struck by an unskilful hand—and as the moving scene was fully displayed, Orpheus himself rose into view, sitting on a grassy knoll, surrounded by all kinds of animals. He was a young man, and had been handsome, before imprisonment and the fear of death had made his cheeks haggard and bowed his shoulders.

His terror was evident and the laughter with which his music was received seemed to paralyze him. A Roman audience had no mercy for a bad performer, and its fury was always roused by signs of fear. Showers of missiles—empty flasks, apples, and eggs —began to fly; but the herald, making a signal for silence, ordered this to cease, "lest the scene or the beasts should take any harm."

"You should have given us a more plucky Orpheus, Stella!" shouted a man in the gallery just below Calpurnia. "As for this fellow, his death is wasted on him—crucifixion is good enough for *him!*"

This sally provoked a fresh burst of laughter, and put the pullati into a better humour. As for the wretched Orpheus, he ceased to attempt to twang his lute, and seemed to shrivel up with terror, till he was visibly smaller.

"Play up! Play up, Orpheus!" roared the pullati. "Has all this fuss been made for you, and you won't even play us a tune?"

"Let the bear loose on him!" bellowed others. "We waste our time. To the bear with him, and let us have the Battle with the Pirates!"

"Silence!" cried the herald, lifting his hand.

And in the silence, a sudden rustling was heard—a sort of shudder ran through the mimic landscape. The birds flapped their wings, and tried to fly, utter-

ing cries of alarm, but were held back by chains till now unseen. The more timid animals around Orpheus plunged and struggled, the wild beasts moved convulsively, as a large dark object emerged from a covert, and stood snuffling the air. It was a huge Caledonian bear—the destined messenger of death to the hapless personator of Orpheus. The whole vast multitude drew in its breath in expectation, as the bear slowly shambled forward, moving his head from side to side in search of his prey. There was something peculiarly horrible in his shuffling motion. Calpurnia's heart stood still, but she could not take her eyes from the slouching, ungainly beast. He seemed too awkward to be ferocious—Calpurnia thought a lion or a panther would have been far more terrible, and half doubted whether he would really kill the miserable criminal whose executioner he was appointed to be.

The unhappy Orpheus, meanwhile, nearly dead with fright, had shrunk back till he seemed to be flattened against the tiny tree, and stood there shaking from head to foot in a palsy of terror, which drew fresh shouts of laughter from the pullati—especially when the wretched man, in one last effort of despair, began to play frantically on his lute, jangling the strings without either time or tune. "An Orpheus! an Orpheus, indeed!" shouted the populace, with

immoderate laughter, which bewildered the bear, for he stopped short, and appeared cowed. Then the populace changed its note, and, with jeers and execrations, hounded him on. "Don't be afraid, little bear—he's a poltroon!" they cried. But still the bear hesitated, while the miserable Orpheus plucked wildly at the strings of his lute, as though he hoped, like the real Orpheus, to disarm his enemy with music. But, alas! he only succeeded in drawing the bear's attention to himself—the beast began to shamble rapidly towards him. The luckless Orpheus shrieked, and tore at the strings till he broke them. Then he hurled the lute at the bear, and, forgetting that he was chained, he sprang away, and fell all his length on the ground. In an instant the bear was upon him, and if he uttered a death-cry, it was drowned in the savage yells of applause which rang through the Amphitheatre, and amidst which the scenery of this brief tragedy sank out of sight.

Calpurnia had turned sick. She fancied that, underneath the clamour, she had heard the bones crunched in the bear's grip. The applause almost stunned her. The sky had clouded over, and the wind blew very cold. People were shivering, and wrapping themselves in their cloaks. Calpurnia saw that her mother's lips were white; as for Cornelia, she sat there as stern and unmoved as ever, her eyes

sometimes wandering to where Domitian lolled in the imperial seat, ostentatiously scribbling on his tablets, or whispering to the scarlet boy, but oftener fixed on her son—so much worthier to sit there. "Aim high enough," the invisible Presence had said. Was it not high enough to covet the purple toga?

CHAPTER XXVII.

"ARISTARCHUS, A CHRISTIAN."

THE herald was just announcing that, while the Battle of the Pirates was being prepared, Aristarchus, a Christian, would be exposed to a Hyrcanian tigress, and the pullati, who were beginning to apply themselves to the contents of their baskets, hastily stuffed their mouths with bread and leeks, and deferred the rest of their repast until the next interval.

At the sound of the word "Christian," Calpurnia felt all the blood rush from her heart up into her face. A trembling seized her, and there was such a rushing in her ears, that even the roar of execration which greeted Aristarchus's appearance, sounded far off, as though veiled by distance. And yet her senses were unnaturally sharpened—a conversation going on in the seats above her, where a number of men of the lower orders had been glad to get standing room among the women, seemed to be close in her ears. A man was saying, "The Christians want stamping

out—that's what *they* want—as Nero did. *He* understood how, and we've heard very little of them since. A parcel of impious wretches, drawing down the vengeance of the Gods upon us!"

An agony of shame and pain tore Calpurnia's soul. Was her playfellow Aulus become one of these? A blackness seemed to fill the air. She was so completely unnerved, that for a moment she fancied it was Aulus who was advancing from beneath the shadow of the great south-eastern entrance, and an intolerable anguish, like an overmastering physical pain, made her gasp for breath. There was a deadly coldness in the air, and a few snow-flakes were falling, dazzling her eyes as she watched that solitary figure crossing the red sand of the arena.

When her vision cleared, she saw a venerable old man, somewhat bowed, but not decrepit; with his flowing white beard, he looked like one of the Greek philosophers whom Piso had sometimes entertained at Baiae. The wind took his garment as he came, and drove up the vermilion-stained dust in clouds which sprinkled the podium as with red rain-drops. Stella, perceiving this, gave the signal for the fountains of perfume to play, and as Aristarchus reached the middle of the arena, sweet essences filled the air, in strange and unnatural incongruity with the now fast-falling snow.

"Aristarchus, will you sacrifice?" cried the herald from the podium.

But before Aristarchus could reply, every one in the Amphitheatre heard a voice say, "Be of good cheer, Brother, and play the man!"

The old man started, and then stood erect, seeming to have cast off all signs of age in a moment. There was a great hubbub in the Amphitheatre, every one declaring that the voice had come from just above where he himself was sitting. It had seemed to Calpurnia to come from just above *her*. The seat-keepers hurried from gallery to gallery, but no one could point out any particular person; and the pullati soon grew impatient, and called loudly for the tigress.

"Aristarchus, will you sacrifice?" cried the herald again.

The pullati broke out into a hoarse bay—they feared that their prey was to escape them. So great was their eagerness, that many of them turned up their thumbs, as though Aristarchus had been vanquished in combat. But their fears were needless. Aristarchus replied that he would pray for Caesar, but not offer him the worship due only to the True God. His voice was feeble, and only those sitting on the podium heard his words; but the whole multitude perceived that he was refusing to sacrifice, and a howl of savage exultation drowned the herald's voice, as he pro-

claimed that Aristarchus, a Christian, had reviled the Genius of the Emperor, and was adjudged to die.

"To the lions! To the lions!" bayed the pullati. "Let out the tigress upon him!"

"We shall see how the old eater of new-born babes will look now," said the man who had talked about Nero. "Half a dozen good lions or tigers would soon settle these Christians, and we should hear no more of them. Domitian should put *them* down, instead of banishing the philosophers—poor old fools!—and the astrologers, who, between you and me, know a thing or two. Jupiter! What is all this delay about?"

"It's the tigress—she won't come out," said a woman. "See! the keepers are kicking her."

"The old sorcerer has doubtless bewitched her," said the man. And then he put both his hands to his mouth, and bawled, "To the lions! To the lions!" And the multitude took up his cry, and howled, "To the lions!" while Calpurnia felt as though her head were being split open by the blows of an axe—every one of those ferocious yells seemed to cleave her brain, and a darkness came over her eyes.

Aemilia was also in an agony of horror; but her anguish was mixed with too many other feelings to be so overpowering at the instant. The plots of Calpurnius Crassus appeared to her to become more

intelligible. She did not believe Aulus had turned Christian; but she now saw, written in letters of blood, the reason why Crassus had accused him. She glanced across the Amphitheatre to where Domitian reclined among his cushions. He was writing on his tablets, but it seemed as though the howls of the mob had just aroused his attention. He looked up; then, turning to Parthenius, whispered something, and waved his tablets at the galleries.

Meanwhile, the tigress lay crouched just close to where the trap-door had opened to cast her forth, her eyes fixed, not on Aristarchus, but on the keepers who were irritating her with goads. With ears laid back, and head between her paws—her cruel white chin resting on the sand—her lean flanks heaving violently, she lashed her tail with slow, heavy strokes, which sent up little whirlwinds of red sand. Perhaps the sudden entrance into the light of day had scared her; or perhaps the falling snow—falling faster every moment—had benumbed her. She did not appear inclined to attack her prey, even when the keepers flung poles with red balls at the end, and pricked her sides with goads. The people murmured.

"This is cold work, Caesar!" shouted a fellow in the seats below, with a stentorian voice, and whose appearance showed he was a smith. "Let us have the lion!"

"The lion! The lion!" bayed the pullati. "The Christian to the lion!"

The tigress was driven off, the earth gaped, and an enormous lion with a black mane reaching to the ground was vomited forth. The spectators yelled and pelted him with apples. But there was no need. He stood for a moment, lashing his sides with his heavy-tufted tail; then, with a deep-chested roar, he shook his mane, and set off towards Aristarchus at a trot.

Suddenly the whole multitude were silent—the vast Amphitheatre, alive with eyes, looking on breathless to see Aristarchus die. He stood there—as he had stood ever since the mysterious voice had bidden him play the man—upright and rigid, and now, as the lion trotted towards him, he extended his arms, as though he would embrace death. Legends grow up around such scenes—some of the spectators afterwards declared that they had seen a lambent flame play about Aristarchus's head. Calpurnia, in that unnatural tension of all her nerves, seemed to see without seeing. There was a mist before her eyes, but she knew that Aristarchus was standing there, with outstretched arms, and she knew that the lion had crouched for his spring. But she saw no more. There was the sound of a heavy fall, a stifled cry, one convulsive shudder of departing life, and the lion lay

stretched on the martyr's body. Then the whole vast hive took breath, with a sound like a great sigh. Calpurnia did not hear it—overcome with terror and horror, and benumbed with cold, her heart stood still, the sea of faces swam round in a dazzling dance of snow-flakes, and she slipped from her seat and fainted.

The snow fell so fast and thick that in a few minutes every part of the building was white. The black mane of the lion was streaked with it as he lay mumbling the body of Aristarchus, lashing his tail and purring so loud, as he licked the flesh off the breast, that Calpurnia heard the sound as she came out of her faint.

"What is it, mother?" she asked; but Aemilia feigned not to understand. There was a movement in the upper galleries—the people were preparing to take refuge in the Portico of Livia—but before they had well left their seats, the herald blew his trumpet and announced that it was Caesar's pleasure that no one should leave his place before the Battle of the Pirates.

The pullati shook the snow from their garments, and grumblingly resumed their seats.

Of course it was impossible to disobey. Poor Calpurnia, sick with cold, in spite of the cloaks in which Cornelia and Aemilia wrapped her, cowered

between them shivering, her head upon her mother's shoulder.

"Barbarous wretch!" muttered Cornelia. "Here, Calpurnia, child, eat a clove—I always carry them."

"I have come to see what is the matter with Calpurnia," said a voice they all knew. It was Fulvia, with Cotilus behind, carrying her chair.

"Lovely Show, isn't it?" she said. "Horrid weather. I should send for some hot wine, Aemilia."

"I have already sent for some," replied Aemilia. But Fulvia did not wait to hear—something more exciting had caught her attention. "Look, look, Aemilia! Look, Cotilus!" she cried, clapping her hands. "The lion won't let them drag away the Christian's body—how deliciously fierce he looks! They may say what they like about a tigress's ferocity —give me a lion! Now he's growling! Oh, he *is* a darling!"

The attendants had come with their hooks to drag away the body of Aristarchus, and the lion resented this attempt to deprive him of his prey. With an action as quick as lightning he buried his claws in the shoulder, and dragging the body underneath him, lay on it, regarding the attendants with looks in which the natural fury of the wild beast contended with the fears born of captivity. At last one of the attendants—a Nubian of huge stature, gaily

attired in crimson and gold—drove him from his prey with blows from the butt end of a spear, and the others, fixing their hooks in the body, drew it along to the dead-gate. The lion, cowed and sullen, slunk after them.

"Poor fellow! I hope they'll let him finish him," said Fulvia. "That's right, Calpurnia—drink it while it is hot. They say, Aemilia, that these Christians give the attendants great sums for the bodies, and so the poor lions are cheated out of their supper. If I were Domitian, I would not let the Christians have the bodies—I'd give them to the poor dear lions. Well, I'm off, Aemilia. A happy Show, Cornelia! I shall come and see you in a few days, and ask you whether there's any truth in a certain rumour."

"She is even more intolerable here than at Baiae!" said Cornelia, scarcely waiting till Fulvia and her satellite were out of hearing.

Meanwhile, the pullati were grumbling at being detained in their seats. The snow was already ceasing to fall, a strip of cold blue sky was visible; the arena, which had for a few minutes been almost white, was red again—except where a long white furrow showed the track made by the body of Aristarchus. Calpurnia heard the people above her complaining of the cold. "It is as bad as the day of the Dacian Games," said

a woman. "Caesar kept us all sitting for hours in the pouring rain. All very fine for him—snug under the cubiculum—and *he* changed his toga, too!"

"What's a little rain?" said a man.

"A little rain! It was like Deucalion's deluge!" cried the woman. "And I can tell you that most of the gladiators died of the chill they got—the gladiators, I say! And so did some of the people. There was poor old Melanthius—he that kept the hot-water shop at the corner of the Ox-market——"

"Never mind him. Let's see what there is in the basket," said the man, who was, to judge from his voice, a remarkably ill-conditioned fellow. "Let's eat, to keep the cold out."

Many other persons followed this example. Baskets were opened, and bread, cheese, onions, radishes, dried figs, hard-boiled eggs, apples, chestnuts, and other frugal refreshments were produced by the plebeian portion of the sightseers, while the more aristocratic anathematized the Emperor under their breath for forbidding them to seek refreshment outside. The odd behaviour of the tigress was discussed, and above all, the mysterious voice, which some were inclined to take for a portent, while others stoutly maintained that it was the trick of some Christian among the spectators.

The preparations for the Battle of the Pirates were

now complete. Two galleys were hoisted up from below, and as they rose into view, the central part of the arena was flooded, so that the galleys appeared to be floating on a lake. The forty criminals—so wild, filthy, and savage, that they seemed scarcely human—who represented the Pirates, defended themselves with ferocious desperation, and slew a good round dozen of the Gladiators, who represented Pompey's forces. The galleys were finally lashed together, and after great carnage on both sides, the Pompeians boarded the Pirates and put them all to the sword, with the exception of their Captain, who was crucified upon a gibbet erected on the shore of the mock lake, and while hanging there was torn to pieces by a leopard.

Calpurnia saw little of all this ghastly spectacle, or of a fight between two women of equestrian families, who, not content with unsexing themselves in the training school, were not ashamed to exhibit themselves along with the lowest slaves to the eyes of all Rome. Seeing Calpurnia's suffering, Aemilia had placed a cushion on the boarded floor of the gallery, between herself and Cornelia, and here Calpurnia, sick and half-unconscious, lay crouched almost out of sight. Aemilia explained to the ladies near her that her daughter was but just recovered from an attack of Campanian fever, and had taken a chill.

It was perfectly true that Calpurnia—so long accustomed to the spring-like winter of Campania, and just now rendered more susceptible by her recent illness—had taken a violent chill, and was already in the first stage of fever. But her bodily pains were as nothing compared with her mental anguish. She had long heard stories of oppression and cruelty, but till to-day she had never seen blood flow—except in her dimly-remembered infancy in Britain, or when once Julius had torn his hand with his father's hunting-spear. In her dreams of the Shows, the Processions and the great scenic displays had chiefly figured—or if she had agreed with Marcella that it would be beautiful to see a combat, she had not bargained for more than the clash of swords and a shrewd blow or two resounding on a helmeted head. To-day, she had seen the arena run with blood, beasts licking the flesh off the bones of men but half dead, torn and mangled limbs dragged like offal over the bloody sand. Worst of all, she had seen a Christian torn to pieces—and Aulus was a Christian. Perhaps her brother Caius also was a Christian. The day might come when they would all be sitting here, as to-day, and the herald might proclaim, that—not Aristarchus, but Aulus Atticus, a Christian, is now to be exposed to the beasts.

A tremendous shout aroused her. She struggled

up, and resumed her place between her mother and grandmother. She was painfully cramped, and glad to change her position. The waves of physical and mental anguish which were beating on her brain seemed to rise mountain-high at the thought, till a merciful interval of unconsciousness gave her a temporary respite. A number of ostriches were hurrying round the arena, their long legs striding over the sand—now golden again—and helped by their short, awkward little wings. The spectators laughed at their ungainly motions and their long necks stretched out in search of some refuge. Calpurnia's eyes were dazed with the half-slumber, half-stupor from which she had just been awakened, and she did not at first observe that Domitian had left his seat and was standing at the edge of the podium, a bent bow in his hand, and a curious arrow, with what seemed a crescent-shaped barb, fitted to the string. Suddenly the arrow flew and decapitated one of the ostriches. The head fell on the sand, while the body, lurching like a drunken man, plunged on for a few strides, and then fell, a heap of disordered feathers, while the remaining ostriches fled on faster than ever.

Deafening shouts greeted this feat of marksmanship. The whole assembly rose to its feet and screamed itself hoarse with laughter and applause, while Domitian kissed his hands and thanked them

with the condescension he always showed to the lower orders. He had often performed this feat at Albanum; but never till now at Rome. He repeated it again and again, till twelve headless bodies had stumbled blindly in the dust, amidst shrieks of laughter from the populace, whose merriment was unbounded at seeing a bird run with his head off.

The last event in the day's performance was a great combat of gladiators, one half of whom fought from chariots, in the British manner, while their adversaries fought as Roman legionaries. The combat was to be to death, and as the two mimic armies marched past Domitian's seat, they clashed their shields and cried, "*Ave, Imperator! Morituri te salutant.*"

This combat, which in all respects, save numbers, resembled an actual battle, gave intense satisfaction to the beholders. The clash of arms, the furious shouts and yells, the arena strewed with dead and dying men, all made up a spectacle dear to the hearts of the Roman mob. The women were as eager as the men; few, indeed, like Aemilia and Calpurnia, were disgusted at such scenes of violence, or, like Cornelia, were offended at the sham triumph. But then both Aemilia and Cornelia were but too well aware of the dangers threatening them to be in the mood for enjoying a spectacle. There had been a malicious smile on Fulvia's face—or so Aemilia

thought—as she alluded to "rumours"—rumours, Aemilia feared, about themselves—perhaps about Piso himself; at the best, about Aulus. Yet Aemilia could scarcely call that "the best," which must bring about the disappointment of her hopes for Calpurnia. In that age of corruption and licence, all the old bonds were loosened. It had once been the boast of Rome, that for five hundred years no Roman had divorced his wife; but now the law itself permitted eight divorces. Aemilia, bred in the simpler and sterner manners of the Provinces, had never grown callous to the state of society in Rome. It filled her with horror to think of Calpurnia as the wife of such a man as Crassus, or as Cotilus. Cotilus had been thrice divorced, and was now a widower, and it was reported that Fulvia meant to obtain a divorce and marry him. Such stories as these were the common subject of conversation in fashionable circles—women even affected to be more licentious than they really were; for it was become a shame to be virtuous, and Fulvia made Aemilia a laughing-stock.

These sad and anxious thoughts of Aemilia's had been constantly interrupted by the shouts of the multitude, watching the combat with the intense interest that only a life-and-death encounter can give. At last it was over. The *Essedarii* were driven back, their chariots overthrown, and the surviving Romans

stood with their swords ready to give the *coup-de-grâce*. There was a commotion on the upper tiers—opinion was divided, and as many thumbs were turned down as up. "Hail, Agricola!" cried several voices. This allusion to the Battle of the Grampians did not escape Domitian. Those sitting near him saw that his countenance grew purple, and expected an outburst of fury. But it was always difficult to reckon upon what Domitian would do. He gave the signal to spare all the vanquished, and, suddenly rising, left the Amphitheatre. The spectators instantly began to move; but before the benches were empty, twilight had settled down, and in the uncertain light, the arena, lately so crowded, and resounding with the clang of arms, looked strangely desolate.

Till very late that night, Calpurnia lay broad awake, thinking about Aristarchus the Christian, and wondering whether Aulus hated her now—since Christians hated all mankind. She could never, she thought, hate Aulus—not even if he were in truth become a Christian. And then Aulus's sunny, boyish head, with its clear, wide-opened eyes, rose up before her, and seemed to rebuke her for believing this foul calumny.

Perhaps the having that day seen so many men die turned Calpurnia's thoughts towards death—however it was, the haunting thought of death came

persistently between her and this vision of Aulus. It had often tormented Calpurnia before. Yes; all must die. Not all by dreadful tortures—torn by beasts, or dragged at chariot wheels—but all must die. Strange consolation, to tell us so! No one so strong, no one so tender and delicate, but must die! Even her father must at last grow feeble and old, and must die, and be no more anything but a waxen image in the atrium—and other Calpurnias, not yet born, would hurry trembling past it on autumn evenings before the lamps were lighted. What would these other Calpurnias know how dear a father he was? And little Tertia—so round and soft and warm—Calpurnia touched her softly as she lay asleep—she, too, must die at last, even if she lived to be as old as Numidia Quadratilla or the Consul Verginius. The idea of Tertia grown old and wrinkled was shocking to Calpurnia. But one must grow old and die—that was certain. The only alternative was to die before one had grown old. It seemed to Calpurnia so shocking to be old, that she imagined old people might perhaps not be so averse to die. Her uncle Arulenus was always saying that wise men had no fear of death. There must, then, be very few wise men.

Beneath all these thoughts that other vision of Aulus Atticus—golden-haired, open-browed, radiant

as the young Apollo—was never absent from Calpurnia's mind. She always thought of him as at Baiae, coming along the alley. She never got beyond the moment when she first saw him flash, like a young God, into the sunny green alley. She could not associate *him* with thoughts of age and death. All the world might grow wrinkled and old, but Aulus must be for ever young.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SCRAMBLE.

The second day's sports were held in the Great Circus, and consisted entirely of chariot races; and if Calpurnia had been less troubled and less exhausted with the night's fever, she might have found here the fulfilment of her anticipations. The day was cloudless and windless—one of those days when the whole world is bathed in light and warmth, and when the humblest *insula* on the Suburran Hill is transfigured in the all-glorious smile of Jove. The tall red finger of the obelisk which August brought from the City of the Sun, built amidst the burning sands of Egypt, pointed up to the bright God of Day. The whole spina was a blaze of marble and gold—one could not look at it. The polished rims of the chariots flashed like little suns. Calpurnia looked down from the high gallery, and forgot the bloody horrors of the day before, when the doors were flung open, and the six chariots—one of each faction—were driven out, gay with flaunting colours and gleaming brass. The

noble horses arched their necks, and shook their ribbon-bedecked manes, and champed their bits. Then Stella dropped the gold-fringed napkin, and the four-and-twenty horses sprang into a gallop, their legs seeming straight with the ground, while the charioteers cracked their whips, and the people shouted for the Green, for the White, or for the Red. The Blue was out of favour—they hissed the Blue charioteer. The Senators mostly shouted for the Gold or the Purple—to flatter Domitian, who had added these to the four old factions of the seasons.

The spectators were nearly beside themselves—they were even more transported with delight than they had been at the combats of yesterday. They frantically waved the race-lists above their heads, as they screamed out their bets. They leapt to their feet, and even stood on the benches—the whole Circus seemed gone mad, and Calpurnia caught the infection, so that she scarcely winced when, at the very moment of passing the goal, the Green chariot was run into by the Red and the Gold. The three chariots were all overthrown. The poles flew up, dragging with them the yoke-horses, who plunged frantically, while the trace-horses lay kicking on the ground, or pawed the sand as they tried to rise. Two of the charioteers were soon up again, feeling their bruises; but the third—he of the Gold cap—lay where he fell,

and, when he was picked up and carried off, his head hung down in a way that made Calpurnia feel sick. But the victor had already shaken the dust from his tunic, and climbed on to the spina, whence he kissed his fingers to the people. A herald called his name, Stella dropped bags of gold over the podium, and the Secretary of the Circus presented them to the victor, just as the bearers of the dead man reached the stables.

"A good thing it was not Scorpus," said an old woman who sat a little above Calpurnia. "I'm sorry for him, though, poor fellow; he was not bad-looking."

"He died an easy death," said an old man, speaking with his mouth full. "He might think himself lucky not to be dragged round the arena at the tail of his chariot, like the green charioteer I saw killed in Claudius's day, when I was a youngster—his brains were scattered all over the place."

Just then, there was a stir among the Senators, and Calpurnia saw her father rise and follow one of the imperial attendants. Aemilia turned deady pale; but the next moment, they saw Piso ascending the steps of the pulvinar, and take a vacant chair between Flavius Clemens and Domitian himself, who seemed to be speaking to him with marked affability.

"Who's that?" asked the old woman behind.

"That's Piso, a great General under Agricola,"

replied a younger man. "They say Caesar caught him conspiring. He's been in disgrace these ten years. He's very rich. It was his cousin that conspired against Nero."

The colour did not return to Amelia's cheeks even when Calpurnia whispered that surely Caesar was well-disposed towards her father, to show him this public honour.

The excitement was, if possible, greater still in the horse-races. The horses, beautiful, fiery creatures, half wild with terror, ran six at a time, without riders. They, too, wore the colours of the factions knotted into their manes and tails with coloured cords, at the ends of which were sharp little goads. They started amid a hideous din of yells, whistles, howls—every sound of which the human throat is capable. "Passerinus wins!" "No; Tigris!" screamed the people. "No; Passerinus!"

Passerinus, a noble milk-white Campanian, answered by redoubling his speed. He and Tigris—a fine Thessalian chestnut—ran neck and neck for a whole lap; but as they approached the goal for the last time, Passerinus flung out his heels, and shot forward like an arrow from a bow, far past the goal, till, checking himself, he stood panting and trembling, his stately neck flecked with drops of blood from the pricks of the goads.

Domitian himself applauded, and Stella ordered a groom to let Passerinus make his obeisance to Caesar. They laid a cushion on the sand, and the generous beast knelt, with a magnificent toss of his mane, as though he would say, "See, Caesar, I lay aside my pride, and confess you Master of the World!"

Domitian flung him a ribbon from Domitia's dress, spoke to Piso, and then whispered in the ears of the boy with the great head, who thereupon got up from Caesar's feet, and made his way to Stella, looking like a bright scarlet ball as he glided along the wall of the podium. When he reached Stella, he whispered to him, with much shaking of his head and wagging of his little hand, to mark the importance of his errand. Presently, the herald flourished his trumpet, and proclaimed that, by Caesar's command, Passerinus should in future run in golden shoes. The people applauded, the Senators being especially eager in their approval. As soon as there was anything like silence, the trumpet sounded again, and the herald announced that, by the munificence of Stella, the Editor of these Shows, there would now be scrambles; after which, an interval for refreshment, and the preparation of the Venatio.

There was vociferous applause, and the people behind Calpurnia became more voluble than ever.

"*You* may think this is a fine Show," said the old

woman. "*I* don't say it's not a good Show in its way. But for a Prince—a real Prince—give me Nero! I was there when they played 'The Fire'—there was a real house afire, and the actors had all the furniture they could save out of it. And the presents! There were real fowls, and tickets for gold and silver, and gems, and pictures, and slaves, and tame bears—yes, and ships and houses! My neighbour, Dama—that was freedman of Milichus, that found out Piso's conspiracy—he got a ship, and sold her for a lot of money! And sea-fights—with real porpoises swimming about—and Pasiphaae—that was the rarest diversion! Ah, he was a funny one, was our little Nero! And then to hear him sing," she continued. "To be sure, his voice was rather gruff, and, as you might say, growling-like—though he always had a lead plate on his breast to clear it. But to see the Captains of the Guard carrying his harp! Ah, that was a sight! But to see him drive in the chariot races was best of all, with his hair—curled in three rows of curls, one above the other—all flying behind him! And then, when he came back from Greece, and drove in through the City wall, because he'd won the crown in the Grecian Games! He came in in a chariot and four white horses—and he was all in purple, and stars on his cloak, flying behind him—and the crown he'd won on his head, and another in

his hand, and a lot more carried before him! And he came here to the Circus—only, you understand, it was before this one was burnt—and they took the wall down for him, and he went through, and out into the Pig-market, and so up to Apollo. And sacrifices all the way as he went, and the streets strewn with saffron, and people pelting him with sweetmeats, and letting doves fly!"

"We're to have doves," said a young woman.

"Doves! What's that?" snapped the crone, sharply. "You wouldn't think much o' *doves*, if you'd ever seen Nero's Golden House. It was too fine for Vespasian, the old hunks—he pulled it down. But there'll never be such a show in *his* Amphitheatre as there was the day Tiridates came in—the Golden Day, they called it, and so it was, to be sure. To see Tiridates with his turban on his head; he *was* a fine man—like a giant. And his Queen, with a gold helmet on, so as not to show her face. They say they rode like that all the way from Armenia, but when he got to Italy, Nero gave him a chariot to ride in. And I've heard tell that at Puteoli, in the theatre, there were more Ethiopians than Italians. And Tiridates sat on a throne, and killed two bulls with one arrow. There's a barbarian King for you, if you like! I'll be bound this Decebalus that they talk about so much, never killed two bulls with one

arrow! But the Golden Day! Oh, my dear, if I was to live as long as the Sibyl, I should never forget it! The City was illuminated the night before—and flowers on all the houses, hanging in garlands—and all the people in white, with laurel branches, and the legionaries drawn up in all the Forums. I was on the top of Dama's house—just by the Old Shops—and I saw Nero come up the Sacred Way—just like a Triumph it was, and the only thing to equal it was the Judaean Triumph—and *that* didn't equal it," said the old woman correcting herself, and determined that Nero's glory should shine supreme. "And the Consuls, and the Pontiffs, and the Senate—all in white! And flowers, and palms, and people shouting! The very sky seemed full of people—they climbed up everywhere—they said a boy walked on people's heads from the Temple of Concord to the Rostra of Julius. And when Tiridates and his lords came up to the chair where Nero sat, at the top of a slope made instead of steps, the people shouted so, you would have thought the Capitol would have fallen down upon us—and they said Tiridates was terribly frightened, but he fell down before Nero, and knocked his head on the ground, and made a speech, and a Praetorian gentleman that stood by translated it. And Tiridates said that Nero was his God, and he was come to worship him. And Nero made him sit

on a little stool at his feet, and crowned him King of Armenia. And, oh! the shouting, when that was done. And, oh! the sight in Pompey's Theatre afterwards—all the inside was covered with gold—that's why they called it "the Golden Day"—and the velum was all over stars, just like the real sky. Ah! I've seen some things in my time, Marcia!"

The old woman paused exhausted, and Calpurnia was able to overhear another conversation going on below her, between some persons who were apparently petty shopkeepers.

"Depend upon it, the Chaldeans know more than we do," said one.

"Pshaw! Tell that to Apella!" said the other. "Cheats every one of them—and fools, too. Who but a fool would ever have pitched on old Nerva for an imperial nativity? Imperial humbug! If it had been Piso, now, or even Trajan—uncommon fine man, Piso, to look at; he'd look well in the purple."

"Hush!" said the other, in alarm, and Calpurnia heard no more.

Every one was now looking up to the highest gallery, whence Stella's bounty was to be rained down on the expectant multitude. Suddenly, amidst the screams and laughter of the people, the air was full of showers of coin, and tickets fluttering down like snow-flakes. "It is the snow-storm of Aris-

tarchus!" cried a wag from the upper tier. The thousands of arms clutching at this largesse had an extraordinary effect. Upon the tickets were written the names of various gifts — animals which had appeared in the arena, baskets of provisions, garments, and ornaments. As the great proportion of the tickets happened to fall among the pullati, Domitian commanded a large number to be thrown into the seats appointed for persons of equestrian and even of senatorial dignity.

It would have been an edifying sight for a Cynic philosopher—and doubtless many of these enlightened persons were to be found among the audience—being present there, of course, merely to take a lesson in human folly—it would, I say, have been very agreeable to a Cynic's frame of mind, to watch the manner in which Domitian's bounty was received.

The common herd—the pullati, or blouses, as one might call them—who had not a toga to bless themselves with—or if they had, only a black one—and whose cloaks harboured fleas whose direct lineal ancestors might have bitten Cincinnatus—these made no more bones of it than pheasants when the Gallinarius calls. They flung themselves on the ground, or leaped high to intercept a ticket or coin before it fell. The men pushed and thrust, the women screamed and scratched, clothes were torn, blows were given,

and sometimes strength and sometimes cunning won the prize.

The pullati had no dignity to lose. They were the profanum vulgus, for whom no poet sang, the riff-raff of the Forum, the scum of the City. They lived on the public corn, and were to be bought by any Clodius or Catiline who chose to hire them. They were ashamed of nothing on earth but of an honest trade. The most rigid Cynic could not have deduced much of a moral from *their* eagerness after the quadrantes and the sestertii. But, sitting with them in the same tiers, and often on the same benches, were other citizens—poor indeed, yet decently clad in togas—only of Altinum wool to begin with, and cleaned until they were threadbare—but still in togas. These respectable persons were accustomed to rise before day to pay their respects to their patrons—who kept them waiting outside the door in the pelting rain. They were grown hoarse with applauding their patrons' speeches in the Courts; but since Domitian, out of his love for the people, had ordered a real supper to be given, instead of the hundred farthings which the bath-man distributed, they had the advantage of a daily scramble for the baskets put out in the Vestibule for clients. By this simple contrivance the patrons obeyed Caesar's edict, and yet avoided eating out of the same dish with Caius and

Balbus. But, despite this daily practice in the primaeval art of scrambling, these toga'd gentry came off second-best. They were as ready as anybody to snatch at the tickets and coins as they came showering down—like Jove when he was making love to Danaë—but they were unwilling to grovel—in a clean toga—in the dust beneath their feet, and this unwillingness gave a half-heartedness to their efforts, on which the Cynic would doubtless have gloated—pointing out to all who chose to listen to him the absurdity of being ashamed of striving after a thing which one desired, and the yet greater folly of desiring a thing which one was ashamed to strive after. Thus the Cynic—himself, we will suppose, a rheumatic elderly person, unlikely to come off well in a scramble.

But the seats below those of the pullati—where sat the substantial citizens, the wealthy freedmen, and all those persons who were not of the equestrian order, and those lower still, where the Knights sat in the glory of the narrow stripe and the gold ring—it was these which afforded the really interesting subjects to the unbenevolent student of human nature. These persons were certainly in no want of sesterces. They could perfectly well afford to buy cranes, ibises, doves, or apes, for themselves, if they wanted them. Their togas were all of Apulian, or at least of Parmesan wool, and a great deal better than those

provided as gifts. They habitually dined on wild boar and pheasants, and were no strangers to the taste of thrushes. But to contemn the gifts of Caesar was impossible—that is to say, impolitic. They therefore feigned an eagerness they could not have felt, and which betrayed its own unreality in an awkwardness which the Cynic would have detected at once. "Behold," he would have said, "that fat Knight. I remember his father—a freedman—selling wine-flagons and trivets under the spear, in the Forum, on market-days. Now his son is made a Knight. Behold him—with a paunch like Montanus's —trying to pick up a ticket which has fallen just between his ankles. He is purple with stooping; he will get an apoplexy—and all that he may possess an aged crane—a bird which has grown too old to be of any use in the Shows, and which the keeper of the Vivarium wants to get rid of."

An observer who was not a Cynic would have been disposed to turn away his eyes from the senatorial benches. The Knight's ring was now notoriously a mere matter of sesterces; but the Senate! Fallen as it was in the persons of so many of its representatives, its name could never cease to be venerable; and it was a pitiful sight to see the broad stripe abasing itself to pick up the bounty of Domitian. There were some of the Senators who affected not to observe this

shower of benefits—others condescended at most to lift up the tickets which fell into their laps. But some—and among them Regulus, Certus, Crispus, and Veiento — appeared anxious to display their eagerness to possess themselves of these marks of Domitian's goodness, and carefully placed their prizes in the bosom of their togas. Their zeal was doubtless reported to Domitian—as most certainly the arrogance of the rejectors was—but he did not remain to see it. He had risen, and was withdrawing by the private way which communicated with the Palatine, making a sign, as he did so, that Piso should follow him.

END OF VOL. I.

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